

Chimamire no Hana

by iWandering-Shapeshifter

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Summary: A wolf pack sticks together no matter what... Is it possible to uphold that truth despite the circumstances? (rated for lang/mild gore. R&R please! (rewritten on 11-12-14))

1. Blossoms

A/N: Hakuouki clearly doesn't belong to me; i only own Kawa (and this story). enjoy~

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><p>Blossoms**

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><p>It felt as if she had been running for hours.<p>

First it was those two ronin that had chased her beyond the lighted areas of the main streets, wishing to do gods-knew-what to her; to her horror, killing her seemed to be on their agenda. For one moment that seemed like a bitter silver lining in the girl's rocky introduction to Kyoto, the ronin had stopped chasing her for some reason. And just as swiftly that silver lining had come, it fled.

Daring to peek around the corner of the building she had hidden herself behind, the girl's brown eyes widened in appalled horror as she nearly came face-to-face with a deathly-pale face that stared at her through wide crimson eyes. The white-haired creature grinned maniacally and raised its blood-spattered sword to cut her down just as it had the two ronin.

The girl instinctively covered her face with her arms and screwed her eyes shut tight, bracing for a death that didn't come. She cracked

open one brown eye, and then the other, when hearing a sickening '_squelch_' that had been dealt to the curious beast; she gawked.

Flicking blood from his blade on reflex, the stoic captain sheathed his katana without so much as a second look at the girl, seeming to give her some sort of relief in believing he hadn't seen her (even though he did).

"Well damn, I wanted ta be the one to kill 'em." A sulky-toned voice said as the captain's companion stepped into the bloody alley; he shot a glance at the stoic man. "Ya beat me to it, Saitou-kun." He added.

"I only did what I was ordered to do." The darker-haired captain remarked blandly, glancing at the girl just as his friend did, fear coloring her face pale. He inwardly groaned; just his luck that there had to be a witness.

No matterâ€¦| The girl's fate would be decided soon.

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><p>She hugged her arms reflexively, wishing she owned a thicker haori. The woman clicked her tongue and her eyes closed with a reflexive sigh.

>Why did the morning have to be so damn cold? Sheeshâ€¦|<p>

Sliding open the back door to the meeting room, she shuffled inside and closed it behind her wake. "You know I'm _not_ a morning person!" She declared, shooting a look at the occupants of the room but saving her glare for the main person who had summoned her out from a warm bed.

Scowling back with violet eyes, he refrained from pinching the bridge of his nose and instead settled for wearing her down via scowling. "I see you're as _chipper_ as ever in the morning." He said pointedly.

The swordswoman '_humphed_' and turned to plonk down next to her lover, arms folded in her sleeves.

Sharing a patient glance with his fellow brunette seated on his right, their leader looked to the room's occupants. "Well now that all of us are here, Gen-san will be present shortly with our guest." He said.

>
A guest?_ She inwardly snorted, throwing a look at their main vice-commander, sliding her eyes closed. _That __**would**__ explain why things seem a little darker this morningâ€¦| I almost feel sorry for whatever unfortunate idiot had come across their 'retrieval' squad_, she mused.

"Good mornin'~, " the brunette at her side said cheerily, earning a one-eyed glance from his lover; she looked at him and then at the one he'd spoken to, both eyes opening and sharpening slightly. "Looks like ya slept well enough; ya've got the marks from the tatami mat all over your face." He said, his smirk stretching a smidge in amusement as the girl's cheeks colored pink and she instinctively covered the lower half of her face.

Her fellow lefty deadpanned, "Don't mess with her head, Souji, she'll think you're telling the truth." He reproached patiently, looking at the girl and adding, "You don't have the tatami marks on your face."

"That's no fair, Hajime-kun; ya didn't have to squeal on me." He remarked cheekily.

The swordswoman quirked a brow at the girl as she shot a look at her companion, noting her brown hair and her likewise-colored doe eyes. _And _Toshi_ dragged her here? Now I have _more_ reason to pity her_, she thought.

"Cut it out you two; that's enough barking for now." Said man quieted both captains, earning a dutiful nod from one and an eye-roll from the other.

The youngest captain present, the youngest brunette of the group by her standards, tilted his head and looked at the girl. "Ne, _that's_ the witness? He looks too scrawny to be of any threat, to me anyway." He piped up from the back of the room.

The older female present deadpanned at his comment, fighting the urge to remark to his observation.

"â€|Shut up, Shinpatsu!" The brunette barked, shooing the older brunette's hand off his messy bangs, pouting at both older brunettes he had seated himself with.

The more patient brunette of the trio snickered, "Ne, Heisuke ya shouldn't be disrespecting your elders like that!" He chided.

"Whatever, Sano, you two old geezers should stow it instead!" Said boy sniffed.

"Who're you calling '_old'?_ Of course I can't speak for _Shinpachi_, but I'm not as old as ya claim I am!" The gold-eyed captain scoffed.

The older blue-eyed captain shot him an indignant scowl, "Oi, Sano, what the hell!" He barked.

"All of you be quiet!" Their kind-hearted commander barked, making the trio stop their antics and look in his direction.

The bespectacled vice-commander shook his head, looking at the girl with an apologetic smile. "Sorry for the ruckus; don't be shy. Please come in, and close the door if you will." He said, seeing her nod slightly and shuffle inside, closing the door in her wake as she sat on the edge of the proverbial circle.

As their commander began introducing himself and the two vice-commanders seated to the left and right of him, the one on his left reproached, "Why're you tellin' the kid everything about us, Kondou-san?"

Blinking once, he looked at him sheepishly, "Is that a bad thingâ€|?" He asked.

"Ya don't have to be so formal to the person you're gonna interrogate." Shinpachi agreed.

Sano chuckled slightly, "well that habit to be formal fits Kondou-san pretty wellâ€|"

Clearing his throat, Kondou resumed the main topic, "In any case! Saitou-kun, please fill us in of the events of the incident." He said.

Nodding slightly, Saitou told the tale. "Last night, two failed warriors encountered a few ronin and cut them down; luckily, we apprehended them before any more harm could be done while they were loose." He looked at the girl with piercing blue eyes. "This one was eyewitness to what had transpired."

The girl piped up, looking at the main trio, "I didn't see a thing!" She said, and at a dubious comment from the young brunette in the back, she added defensively, "I swear I didn't!"

"Well if ya say soâ€|" Heisuke mused, still disbelieving.

Shinpachi raised a brow, "Not according to what Souji said; he mentioned you helped those ronin."

"No, I didn't! Those ronin were chasing me, and then by some miracle, the soldiers from the Shinsengumi saved my lifeâ€|" The girl defended, brow contorted into a frown.

Kawa caught the bemused smirk hedging said man's lips and she ribbed him pointedly, scowling slightly at the brunette. _Why doesn't that surprise meâ€|?_ She wondered, making a mental note to clock him for misleading the baka trio.

"So that means you saw the soldiers that cut down the ronin, then." Shinpachi deduced.

Sano spared the girl a slight smile, commenting, "You look like an honest kid, but stillâ€|"

"Grow a pair, you two. Just kill her and the problem is solved." Souji commented nonchalantly.

"Chivalry doesn't _exist_ with you, does it?" Kawa cuffed him reproachfully, ignoring the hurt pout that crossed his handsome face.

"Don't joke about that, it's not legal to just kill an innocent civilian!" Kondou reproached his prodigy.

Souji rubbed his head gingerly, shrugging, "It was just a joke, there's no need to get huffy."

Saitou rolled his eyes, inwardly sharing in the swordswoman's exasperation with their comrade. "Then talk about jokes that actually sound funny."

"I won't say anything to anyone, I swear!" The girl pleaded again, looking desperately to the main trio.

Brow fixed into his usual scowl, Toshi silenced her. "Stop blathering. Saitou, take her away." He said, ignoring the girl's pleas even as she was dragged back to her designated room.

Kawa rubbed her neck aimlessly, "So how's my complaining looking _now?_" She wondered, smirking at her '_brother'_.

"_Still_ annoying." Toshi sniffed, ignoring the blown raspberry from her.

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"So you came all the way from Edo because of your fatherâ€|" Kondou summarized with a sympathetic frown.

Toshi sighed, "that explains as to why a girl your age would be posing as a man." He said.

Kondou nodded once and then froze, light-brown eyes opening. "W-wait, you're a girl!?" He balked.

"**YOU'RE A GIRL**!?" Shinpachi and Heisuke exclaimed from the back.

Kawa slapped her forehead and groaned. "That's it, I'm buying you lot glasses for the new year!" She said.

"O-oi, what's _that_ supposed to mean, Kawa-chan!?" Heisuke was the first to bark, pouting at the woman.

"Duh, of course she's a girl!" Souji defended lightly, pretending the younger brunette didn't bark an insult at him.

"Why didn't I see it beforeâ€|? Souji, why didn't you tell me!" Kondou exclaimed in a mixture of shame and exasperation, looking at his prodigy pointedly.

"Ya didn't ask, Kondou-sanâ€|" Souji replied with an innocent shrug.

Shinpachi pondered, "Well if you're a girl, then how can ya prove it?" He asked.

"'_Prove'_ it howâ€|?" The Yukimura girl blinked once or twice.

Sano snickered, "maybe ya should strip just for evidence's sake."

"Eh!?" She squeaked.

"If you two seriously ever want to get laid one day, harassing an innocent girl is only gonna drive women away from you." Kawa declared, left brow twitching as she scowled at the older brunettes.

"Like _you're_ one to talk, ya made Souji wait for years to ever get any!" Heisuke scoffed.

"Shut up!" Kawa snapped annoyedly, cheeks rosy red as she glared at all three of the baka trio.

"All of you, shut it!" Toshi ordered, watching his '_sister_' wince slightly at his curt tone, glaring at the trio of captains as well as the brunette who smirked bemusedly at his hushing them up.

San'nan-san smiled patiently at the group, looking at the girl. "Sorry, but you said your name was Yukimura Chizuru, didn't you? Then perhaps you're related to Yukimura Kodou, the revered Western medicine doctor?" He asked.

Alertness highlighted her features as the girl nodded, "You know my father?" She asked of the room at large.

Toshi's scowl on his brow tightened at hearing she called the man her father; Kawa frowned.

"So _you're_ Kodou-san's daughterâ€|" Kondou mused.

"How much do you know, then?" Toshi asked her, seeing confusion glint in her brown eyes.

"_'How much_' what?" She echoed.

"Don't act stupid, I'm asking what you know about Kodou-san." Toshi hardened his tone.

She perked up and demanded, "What's that supposed to meanâ€| Did something happen to him?"

Saitou cut in before their vice-commander could speak again, "A few months ago, there was a fire at the clinic Kodou-san worked at. He's been missing ever since." He elaborated.

"His body wasn't found, which was mystifying, so we're assuming he's involved with a case." San'nan-san contributed.

Toshi finalized, "Ironically, we've also been looking for Kodou-san. If you say you'll forget about what happened the other night and keep your mouth shut, we'll offer you protection while we look for your father."

"Don't worry, we'll find him for you!" Kondou agreed with a flash of his kind smile.

Chizuru nodded, "Thank you!"

Souji piped up, "Ne, so I guess it's good ya weren't killedâ€| for now, anyway!" He said, smiling at the girl as she nodded a little.

"If that's the case, then you'll hafta be treated better, right?" Shinpachi wondered, smiling brightly at her.

Kawa rolled her eyes. "Ham."

"Given yer pretty soft on girls, you'll stick to that won't ya, Shinpatsu?" Heisuke joked.

"Shinpachi won't be the only happy one around here now that there's

gonna be _two_ girls sticking around." Sano laughed slightly.

San'nan-san pointed out thoughtfully, "We obviously can't treat her as a warrior, compared to Yasakawa-kun, so we'll have to think of some other way to treat her."

Toshi huffed, "then put her as someone's page, like San'nan-san or Kondou-sanâ€|" He began.

Souji chuckled, "Not to burst yer bubble, but it'd be best to let her be _your_ page instead, Hijikata-san." At said man's glare, he grinned cheekily, "It _was_ your idea after all!"

"Souji's right, actually!" Kondou chimed, pretending their vice-commander didn't balk at the idea.

San'nan-san nodded, "It appears you're outnumbered, Hijikata-kun. We're counting on you to keep an eye on her." He said lightly.

Toshi glared at them, groaning. "You're all insaneâ€|" He ignored the snickers and cheeky comments from the baka trio, looking at the second woman. "If she's going to be here a while, Yasakawa, you're sharing your room with her." He delegated, perking her ears.

Kawa started to protest, but for the knowing look she earned from her old friend, she sighed. "Fine. Chizuru-chan, c'mon, I'll show you to the room." She spared the brunette at her side a brief smile before shuffling to her feet and leading the way to her room via the back hall, the younger girl following.

Given they lived in a compound full of men, she supposed he _did_ have a pointâ€| But still, he didn't have to be so uptight about it. Sheeshâ€|

"Um, Yasakawa-chanâ€|" The younger girl began when they entered her room, perking her ears.

She opened her closet and pulled out a folded spare futon, closing the doors. "_'Kawa-chan_' is better." She looked at her new roommate and smiled slightly, "only Toshi, Kondou-san and San'nan-san call me by my full name." She corrected, shuffling past her to unfold the mattress away from the door leading to the porch.

"Right, I'll remember that. Kawa-chan, if you don't mind my asking, you don't think I'll beâ€| y'know, killed, do you?" Chizuru asked carefully, fiddling with her _kosode_ sleeve's hem.

Blinking at the idea, Kawa shook her head and straightened from fixing the futon, placing a hand on her hip. "Nope. Sorry if the boys spooked you; Souji's usually got aâ€| interesting sense of humor, so he didn't mean it. The baka trio won't lay a finger on you either, or it's my foot up their asses. Saitou-kun is pretty chivalrous towards girls. And Toshiâ€|" She smiled wryly, chuckling. "Don't tell anyone, but he's a bit of a softie, when he wants to be."

Chizuru glanced at the futon and smiled slightly, "Okita-san, he seems really attached to you." She mused.

Kawa blinked again and then quirked a brow. "How do you figure?" She

asked curiously.

"O-oh, um, wellâ€¦ He didn't mind letting you scold him earlier for saying what he said, and he didn't leave your sideâ€¦ It looks like he loves you." She explained, cheeks a slight shade of pink, as she relayed what she had observed between the two.

Gray eyes softening thoughtfully, the swordswoman smiled, rubbing her arm absently. "Didn't think it was that obviousâ€¦" She stifled a yawn. "Guess it's been a long day for you, huh? I'm pretty beat, tooâ€¦" She mused, smiling again.

Maybe this kid wasn't so bad after allâ€¦

Once the lights were out and both girls were settled into bed, the older lay awake, letting what had been said in the meeting still process through her brain.

>
Why would Kodou-san just disappear like that; didn't he even think about his own childâ€¦?_ Kawa inwardly sighed, turning on her right to face the door. She perked up at seeing a familiar silhouette nearing the door from the porch; shaking her head, she glanced to see Chizuru was sound asleep before shuffling as quietly as possible out of bed and to step onto the porch.

Meeting his green eyes, she exhaled and smiled slightly at him, tugging on his sleeve to sit a few feet away and to the side from her bedroom door. "Your timing sucked tonight." She chided quietly.

Rolling his eyes at her complaint, Okita Souji slung his arm around her shoulders to pull her close, letting her latch her arms around his ribs to feel warmer. "Can't I come check on ya without getting scolded?" He remarked, smirking at her.

Hijikata Yasakawa burrowed her nose into his neck, sighing. "Not in this lifetime." She replied with a soft chuckle.

The lanky samurai shivered lightly at her breath on his neck, squeezing on her shoulders. "I had a feeling ya weren't sleeping just yet." He mused.

Ignoring the slight burning in her cheeks, the swordswoman huffed and rested her cheek on his collar bone. "What kept you up, then?" She returned.

"Nothin' much, just talking with Hijikata-san." He shrugged, his thumb rubbing circles on her upper sleeve.

"Hm." She murmured, closing her eyes. "Don't tell me he's sulking about his new page." She smiled amusedly at just picturing said man's balking expression.

"Basically." Souji hummed, making her giggle, and he sighed as he looked out at the cold courtyard. "Just thinks it's suspicious that the kid was present the other night when we killed those Rasetsu. 'Course, y'know Hijikata-san as much as I doâ€¦" He mused quietly.

"You think the same, then?" Kawa asked softly, lifting her head to read his eyes.

For as long as she'd known him, his eyes were always the ones to give away his real emotions he hid behind his sarcasm and nonchalance.

Closing his eyes momentarily, he let a soft puff of semi-translucent breath escape his lips as he resumed rubbing circles on her shoulder with his thumb. "He's not wrong, I'll give 'im that. But the kid's tellin' the truth; hell, she fainted just seein' Hijikata-sanâ€¦ Just because she's related to Kodou-san don't mean we should trust her with anything." He answered carefully, looking at her at last, and she saw a hint of uncertainty shine in his green stare.

She exhaled and nodded, the sensible part of her whole-heartedly agreeing with two men she loved and respected, whereas the more-dormant girly part of her deflated at basically hearing she had to keep her distance.

"It's been a long day, I suppose." She mused, smiling up at him.

He nodded and smiled wryly, reflexively brushing some of her bangs back. "Shame ya can't leave the kid, otherwise I'd gladly keep ya warm all night." He mused, green eyes teasing and light.

Blushing humbly, Kawa smacked his chest lightly with her palm. "Not tonight." She sighed, reluctant to detangle from him and retreat to her room. "You need sleep, anyway; you lot pulled an all-nighter hunting those accursed things." She reminded quietly.

"I can forego sleep if it means havin' you in my bed, princess." Souji pouted cutely, instinctively squeezing her shoulders.

Shaking her head with a soft giggle at his expression, Kawa kissed him gently and pulled away to get up. "Sleep, kitten." She returned, smirking at the visible twitch his left brow gave. He hated being called '_kitten'_â€¦ Which coincidentally made teasing him about it that much more amusing.

Souji exhaled and rubbed his neck, watching her straighten to retreat to the darkened bedroom. "Ya can be so mean sometimes, Kawaâ€¦"

"You're a big boy; you can handle it," Kawa rolled her eyes, looking at him and offering a genuine smile. "Love you."

Blinking once, his green eyes softened as they did whenever she said she loved him. "Love you too, princess." Souji smirked fondly at his lover, straightening to retreat to his own room just as she snuck back inside hers as quietly as possible.

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Kawa ran a hand through her hair absently as she made her way down the porch to check on her roommate.

Gods knew the girl was bored out of her wits; Toshi had ordered the five captains to keep guard over their room while he and San'nan-san went to Osaka on business. He hadn't ordered her to be part of the shifts mainly because she helped Inoue-san cook the meals.

Then again, having _any_ of the quintet keeping an eye on a technically-imprisoned teenager was going to be anything **but** drollâ€¦ Especiallyâ€¦

"_H-how long were you sitting there, Okita-san!?-_"

Kawa sighed as she rounded the corner, deadpanning at the sight; _yep, I jinxed it_, she thought.

Said man raised a brow in mock-innocence, "Hm, ya didn't notice I'd been here? My shift was supposed to last an hour." He explained calmly, noting her roommate stood near the far post, perking up. "Isn't that right, princess?" He said, his calm smile stretching into an elated grin.

"W-wait, so you both heard me?" Chizuru asked embarrassedly, looking from one to the other, her dread growing.

Kawa spared her lover a knowing look, exhaling. "I just came from preparing dinner; I didn't hear anything aside from your startled question." She answered patiently.

"Why doesn't it surprise me that _Souji_ was the reason I heard that bark?" Saitou wondered aloud as he had materialized next to his fellow lefty, a tray of food on hand.

"Oh c'mon, Hajime-kun, I'm not **that** scary! 'Sides, _Hijikata-san's_ a thousand times worse when it comes ta scarin' the crap out of the kidâ€¦" Souji pouted sorely at his old friend, straightening from his seat under the girls' window.

Rolling her eyes, Kawa spared the girl an apologetic smile before looking at the two men. "It'd prolly be less boring if Chizuru-chan ate with us instead of eatin' here alone." She reasoned, earning a surprised look from said girl and two raised-brow expressions from Saitou and Souji.

"Hijikata-san specifically said for us to keep an eye on her in shifts, not all at once." Saitou reminded her.

Souji rolled his eyes and folded his arms in his sleeves. "Ya'd be killing two birds with one stone, Hajime-kun. 'Sides, what's one more girl around gonna hurt? Hijikata-san will chew us out one way or another, too." He said the last sentence with a cheeky smirk.

His ears slightly burned. Saitou hated being cowed, especially by the 'double-trouble duo'; but then again, thanks to how said man worded it, he couldn't argue with Souji's comment about their ordersâ€¦ He exhaled. "Come on, the other three are probably starving by nowâ€¦" He turned to lead the way back to the dining hall.

Kawa beamed and bounced over to open the door for her roommate as Souji trailed after Saitou's lead. "Thank you, Saitou-kun!" She sang over her shoulder.

Saitou's left cheek gave the slightest tic; Souji smiled complacently at his friend's demise.

"Oi, what're you gonna do about my complainin' stomach!?" Shinpachi was the first to welcome the quartet, a hand placed over his

grumbling belly as he scowled at the group.

Saitou jerked a thumb at the couple. "Ask them." He said, still slightly miffed about being subdued, placing the girl's tray down near Kawa's as he took his place next to Souji.

Sano perked up slightly at seeing the younger girl as she traipsed inside after the stoic man, both brows raised. "Why're you here?" He asked confusedly, sharing in Heisuke's and Shinpachi's confusion.

Chizuru smiled sheepishly, "Kawa-chan invited me, and Okita-san and Saitou-san gave it the '_okay_'." She answered, letting said woman sit first before following suit.

"Ne, Saitou, sounds like yer goin' softâ€|" Shinpachi teased with a knowing smirk at the younger man.

"Forcibly." Saitou huffed, placing a piece of fish in his mouth and clamping up shortly afterward, taking great interest in his meal.

Sano snickered, "That's our Kawa-chan for you." He said, ignoring the slight tic that appeared on Saitou's cheek.

Souji shot him a look, right brow twitching. "I told ya not to flirt with my woman, Sano-sanâ€|" He reminded cattily.

Kawa handed him the bottle of _sake_, pulling on his cheek chidingly. "Try and enjoy the _food_, dummyâ€|" She grumbled, cheeks slightly pink at his possessive pronoun.

Dinner continued at a calm paceâ€| or as calm as it could get; Shinpachi and Heisuke bickered over their food like puppies, whereas the more reasonable quartet â€"that is, Saitou, Kawa, Souji and Sano, the lattermost partially included in the 'more reasonable' group mainly because he associated with Shinpachi and Heisukeâ€"watched in half-bemusement, half-boredom.

"Sorry for the interruption everyone," Inoue-san spoke up as he poked his head into the dining room, earning seven sets of eyes to fall on him and the grim expression on his face as he added, "I've got some news from Hijikata-san in Osaka; apparently San'nan-san acquired a critical injury." He informed.

Shinpachi was the first to ask, "What happened to him?"

"From what Hijikata-san said, he obtained an injury to his left arm. It's not serious enough to warrant death, though." Inoue-san answered, the grimness still present.

Chizuru sighed, "Well that's a relief."

"No it isn't!" Heisuke piped up, confusing the girl.

Saitou took the moment to elaborate, "A sword isn't meant to be wielded single-handedly. For all we know, he probably won't be able to use a sword again." He said.

Kawa frowned at the thought, popping a clump of rice into her mouth.

"That doesn't mean he won't be vital to the Shinsengumi, in some way." She mused quietly once Inoue-san left.

"Maybe you're right, princess, and if you're not, then that means we'd just have to use that medicine on him." Souji remarked in the same tone, pausing in sipping from his cup.

Shinpachi spoke up before the swordswoman could reproach him, "Don't talk like that! We can't let a vice-commander into the Shinsengumi." He said knowingly.

Chizuru blinked in confusion, looking at the group. "Sorry, but I thought San'nan-san was the deputy vice-commander of the Shinsengumi already?" She asked slowly.

"Well, actually" Heisuke began to elaborate.

"**Heisuke**." Kawa interjected sharply, scowling at the younger captain before looking at his age-mate with strangely tightened gray eyes. "Sorry, Chizuru-chan, but please forgive his slip-up. That information is, for all intents and purposes, ****classified****. It's not wise for you to pry into such dangerous territory." She explained grimly, lowering her gaze to the chopsticks on hand and closing her eyes momentarily, resuming her meal.

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><p>AN**: so, there's the first chapter. surprised it was so long... OTL anyway~ i'll try to update soon. also, if anyone's interested, there's a ****bio page for**** Kawa** on my RP Blog, ****shewolf**-**of**-**mibu**.**tumblr****, just to get a better feel of this story. and if you feel totally lost, please feel free to read this story's predecessor, Tenrai-Tsumi.

*title: '****_Chimamire_ _no_ _Hana_****' - '****Bloody** **Flowers****_' (many thanks to Google Translate for that)

2. Tides

****Tides****

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><p>Souji rolled his eyes at the bickering puppies' antics; Kawa shook her head, sipping her soup contently. By this point everyone present (except Chizuru) was so used to the baka trio's antics at dinner that it was almost passÃ©.<p>

"Knock it off, you two; you're annoying Yukimura-kun." Inoue-san finally spoke, cutting in just as Shinpachi was only seconds from pulling Heisuke into a headlock, earning both sets of blue eyes to round on said girl.

Chizuru laughed weakly, sweatdropping at being put on the spot.

Kawa took the sake bottle from Saitou's tray to pour another shot just as the side door from the back-hall opened to reveal their returned vice-commanders; she perked up.

"We're back." Toshi said calmly as he stepped inside first to take his seat on Kondou's left, catching the slightly surprised expressions on the faces of the quartet "Souji, Saitou, Kawa, and Inoue-san" that were fixed on San'nan-san as he followed his fellow vice-commander inside.

"Well done, vice-commander, deputy vice-commander." Saitou spoke first, earning a nod from the former.

Souji smiled slightly, "Good to see you're back, San'nan-san." He chimed, receiving a brief smile from the man.

"You both did well out there. How's your arm?" Kondou agreed, looking at the bespectacled vice-commander.

San'nan-san shrugged, "See for yourself; I was too careless." He joked slightly.

Kawa afforded a slight smile, throwing a concerned glance at her 'brother'.

At noting the blank stares on the captain's faces, San'nan-san smiled brightly even though one could swear it didn't reach his eyes. "But I'll be fine! It's not as bad as it looks, so there's nothing to worry about. If you'll excuse me," he nodded slightly to his superior before straightening and leaving the room.

"San'nan-san, aren't you gonna eat?" Heisuke asked confusedly just as he was about to close the door.

"I'm a bit tired, so I'll pass and just head to my quarters." San'nan-san assured, closing the door on the conversation.

Souji frowned slightly at his leave, looking at his old friend, "Exactly how bad is his injury, Hijikata-san?" He asked.

"I can't say for sure!" Toshi began when noting there was an extra in their company, and he scowled as he recognized the younger girl who sat between Shinpachi and Sano. "What're you doing here; who let you come eat with us?" He demanded, perking her ears.

Chizuru faltered, looking down, "I, um!"

The second female shook her head as Kondou, the baka trio, and Inoue-san tried to take the heat for her (chivalry wasn't dead after all, who knew?), and she said clearly, "It was **my** idea. She's my roommate, so I'll accept the consequences." She looked at his violet eyes resignedly.

Toshi scowled again, "Just because you're roommates doesn't give you the right to bypass my orders, Yasakawa." He scolded.

"I'll just finish eating in the room, if it's alright!" Chizuru offered, slightly hurt that she had to leave the company of her new friends so soon!

"Only at mealtimes." Toshi stopped her, meeting her surprised brown stare and holding it for a second before he exhaled, looking away. "Suppose I'll eat something, too." He mused.

Kawa smiled softly at him as Inoue-san got up to fetch him a tray, sipping her drink. "Softie." She teased.

Toshi shot her a look, "Bite me."

* * *

><p>"While I'm not pissed off yet, ya might wanna think about givin' back that fish!" Souji wagered cattily.<p>

"What the hell's all the noise for?" Kawa groaned as she also poked her head out of the bedroom window at having heard Souji's voice, blinking once and then twice as she focused on the cat that had escaped his clutches and now sat on the overhanging roof. She deadpanned. "Oi!"

Saitou also deadpanned at having his friend's words being ignored by the feline that scratched behind its ear as if he hadn't said anything or was pointing a butcher's cleaver at it, "I think it's ignoring you." He said.

Souji clicked his tongue and exhaled, "Ya leave me no choice then! Yamazaki-kun, get the cat." He looked at the investigator boredly.

"W-wait, why _me?_" Yamazaki demanded, scowling at him.

"You were the one who opened the door when Hajime-kun told ya _not_ to, so it's only fair." Souji explained, left brow slightly twitching at the state of things.

Yamazaki scowled at the cat and then at the samurai, "Given the predicament, I think it'd be best to inform the vice-commander about the cat." He defended.

"You _seriously_ wanna involve Toshi with this?" Kawa grumbled from overhearing them, shaking her head.

Souji scoffed, "Ya really wanna bug _Hijikata-san_ about some stupid cat?" He remarked; the idea sounded pretty lame, downright idiotic, by his standards.

"Well, when you put it that way!" Yamazaki muttered, faltering at the irrationality of his own words, blinking as the cat then walked off with the fish in its jaws.

Saitou wanted to slap his forehead. "I don't suppose you have a _better_ idea?" He wondered blandly of the two men.

His brow twitched again; Souji huffed, "Maybe ya can _think_ of one as I get that stupid cat; c'mon, Hajime-kun," he jogged after said feline with Saitou following shortly, pretending he didn't notice both girls had been watching them.

"H-hey, wait, Okita-san!" Yamazaki barked as he tailed the duo.

Chizuru sweatdropped; Kawa giggled, shaking her head. "It's kinda weird if you think on it, a cat chasing a cat!" She mused.

"Oi, girls, y'mind if we borrow your room for a minute?" Shinpachi said as he, Sano and Heisuke entered the girls' room, surprising the younger.

Kawa raised both brows at them, folding her arms. "To what do we owe the intrusion, boys?" She wondered blandly.

"That thing got the jump on us again," Heisuke grumbled.

Shinpachi huffed, "Cripes, how many times is that now, _twenty?_"

"It doesn't matter how many times it's _been_; if we don't do something about it _soon_, this could get ugly." Sano sighed.

"You're not talking about Inari-chan, are you?" Kawa asked, both brows remaining lifted, earning the trio's attention.

"_'Inari-chan'?_" Heisuke repeated with a blink of his teal eyes.

"You _named_ it?" Sano demanded incredulously.

Kawa pouted slightly, brow set into a defensive scowl. "Can you blame me; she's cute!" She declared.

"Then you might as well _adopt_ that flea-bag, if ya've already _named_ it!" Shinpachi scoffed.

"Are you guys talking about the cat?" Chizuru broke in before her roommate could argue, looking from the trio to her friend.

Sano nodded, throwing a look at the older female, then looking at her. "Yep. That cat's been stealing from us for over a week, now; Shinpachi and I were preparing lunch last week when the catâ€¦| _Inari-chan_, I meanâ€¦| jumped in and made a fine mess of the kitchen. Now it comes every two or three days for food." He explained.

Heisuke lamented, "I helped them cover it up last time, but stillâ€¦|"

"Let's just hope Hijikata-san don't catch wind of it." Shinpachi mused aloud.

Kawa winced slightly at the notion, shaking her head. "_Gods_ I can hear him nowâ€¦| Not sure if he'd clock you first and then chew you out, or the other way aroundâ€¦|" She scritch'd the back of her head.

"Like he'd be that _lenient!_" Souji scoffed as he and Saitou filed into the room, the former taking a spot next to Kawa. "Knowin' Hijikata-san, he'd prolly give ya a triple-scoop on the head and then brain ya to death with his katanaâ€¦|"

"We didn't get the cat, and in any case, we shouldn't make him worry over something _this_ trivial." Saitou agreed, "The proper solution is to fix this on our own."

Sano looked at the younger captain, "where ****is**** Hijikata-san, anyway?"

"I'm pretty sure he's in a meeting with Kondou-san and San'nan-san." Heisuke answered thoughtfully.

Shinpachi pondered, "In that case, we'll have to clean up the kitchen and then cook again to cover our tracks."

Souji pointed out, "We can't just ignore the cat."

"We'll split up, then." Saitou chimed.

"Shinpachi and I'll see to the kitchen." Sano proposed.

"Hajime-kun, Kawa and I'll find the flea-bag! _Inari-chan_, I mean." Souji said, shooting a look at his lover.

Cheeks coloring, Kawa rubbed her neck, "Oh, you heard that?" She sang sweetly.

"W-wait a sec, you want me to deal with Hijikata-san and the other two ****alone****!?" Heisuke yelled in surprise.

Souji and Saitou both looked at the younger girl seated next to the latter. "Not by _yourself_." Saitou disagreed calmly.

Chizuru blinked once and then twice, "M-me?"

:::::lDl:::::

A faint meow came from the courtyard.

Rousing, Kawa looked to see her roommate sticking her head out the window, thus explaining why she heard the meow; she shook her head, shuffling to join her, blinking back and when seeing Toshi seated on the far-end of the porch talking to the cat.

The older girl smiled wryly at the sight; she'd only heard that cats liked women _and_ demons, but to see an actual visualization of said rumor! She wanted to giggle, but she bit down on her lip to keep her mouth shut, watching the cat scamper off into the bushes clustered near the low wall.

>
Well, see you around, Inari-chan!

"What're ****you two**** doing up so late?" Toshi demanded gruffly of both girls, making the younger squeak as the older jumped slightly at being pulled out of her thoughts.

"Um, well!" Chizuru faltered, her cheeks coloring a dark pink at being found out.

Kawa smiled cheesily at him, rubbing her neck, "Oh, Toshi, didn't see you there!" She greeted lightly, knowing he was going to chew her out by morning.

>
Cripes!

"If it's ****late****, then get back to bed, both of you!" Toshi ordered sharply, making the older girl wince.

"_H-hai!_" Chizuru yipped and instinctively bowed, accidentally smacking her forehead on the windowsill and yelping an '_Ow!_' as she scrambled back into the room.

Kawa covered her mouth to hide her giggling, catching the bemused smile on his face; she grinned mischievously. "_Hmm_, getting soft are we~?" She drawled playfully, watching the smile drop when he noticed she'd caught him.

Toshi coughed, his cheeks coloring pink, and he glared pointedly at her. "Go to sleep, Yasakawa!" He ordered.

"You got it, **onii-chan**!" Kawa saluted, shutting the window and hearing him bark, '_Don't call me that!_' as she closed it. She shook her head and laughed quietly as she shuffled back to bed.

* * *

><p>Saitou looked in the girl's direction when feeling her eyes on him. "Do you need something?" He asked.<p>

"Oh, um," Chizuru began, shuffling to face him properly, slightly blushing as she felt Souji's and Kawa's eyes rest on her from their spot on the porch, "Actually I wanted to ask if you'd let me go look for my father, around the Capital." She said.

"That's not possible, given there're a lot of people who want to kill us as well as the fact that there are no available soldiers to offer as an escort for you." Saitou declined, resuming his training.

Souji raised a brow at noting her downcast expression, "Ya _might_ be able to come with us though, while we do our rounds." He proposed, earning a look from Kawa and mild glance from Saitou.

Chizuru perked up at his words, "R-really, you'd let me come with you?" She asked excitedly.

Kawa elbowed Souji, "it's not that _easy_ y'know. You've got to at least know hand-to-hand combat _and_ to wield a sword. Your kodachi isn't exactly intimidating, either." She stated calmly.

"I know how to wield a sword! I used to attend a dojo to learn how to use my short sword, actuallyâ€¦" Chizuru defended, earning a raised brow from the older girl, and she scowled stubbornly.

"Since you sound so confident, I'll test you." Saitou declared, making the trio look at him in slight surprise.

Souji hummed and smirked amusedly, "This should be fun."

Kawa watched as they prepared to spar, legs dangling over the lip, glancing from Saitou to Chizuru. Given he was left-handed much like her, she knew Saitou was a formidable opponent, and to this day he still surpassed her in skill. She knew next to nothing about Chizuru's own skills, even if she did claim she knew how to wield a sword.

"O-of course it's not for show! But wouldn't you die if I struck you with my sword, Saitou-san?" Chizuru's chirped bark pulled her from

her thoughts, earning a look from her.

Souji laughed even as Saitou twitched slightly at her ludicrous thinking, "That's hilarious that you honestly think ya can cut down Hajime-kun!" He chortled.

"I-it's not funny, Okita-san!" Chizuru barked, slightly blushing in embarrassment.

Kawa rolled her eyes, "If you're that concerned with hurting him â€"which I doubt, personallyâ€"then use the blunt side of your sword." She advised patiently, seeing her roommate nod slightly.

Drawing her sword, Chizuru turned it so the underside faced skyward, and she gave a slight battle-cry as she charged, sword raised high.

Within seconds, Saitou had disconnected her sword from her grip, and as she turned slightly on him, he raised his katana's blade so the sharp end threatened to cut her throat, surprising her.

"W-what just happenedâ€|?" Chizuru balked, surprised and confused at the same time, even as Saitou drew his arm back and sheathed his katana.

"I might've forgotten to mention that Hajime-kun's a master at the quick draw." Souji commented lightly from the porch, straightening to his feet.

Chizuru looked at her dropped sword, gaping, "B-but howâ€| he was fast!"

Kawa picked her discarded sword from the ground, assessing its lightness in her left hand's grip, offering it back to her. "Saitou-kun's the fastest swordsman out of all of us, really. You're lucky this was just practice, ya'd have been dead if it was serious." She declared, letting her take the sword and return it to the scabbard at her left hip.

"Rightâ€| Wait, so does this mean I can go?" Chizuru nodded, looking at the two captains hopefully.

Saitou nodded slightly at her, "Be proud of your sensei, your blade was unclouded. We'll talk with the vice-commander about getting clearance for you." He answered.

"T-thank you!" Chizuru chirped with a happy light in her eyes, watching the trio leave.

Souji smiled slightly at her, "Keep in mind that if ya try to run or get in our way while we're on patrol, we'll kill ya." He reminded.

Kawa smiled gently at the younger girl as she nodded vigorously, sighing and retreating to the shade of the porch, tugging on his sleeve. "C'mon, let's go." She urged, glancing back at her roommate and winking.

Saitou rolled his eyes at her, leading the way inside with the couple

following. "Don't tell me you wish to train her." He wondered, looking at the swordswoman. Given he'd known her well over a few years, he knew she had a sympathetic and kind side to her. He could tell she took pity on the girl, even so much as to befriend her.

If Kawa wasn't the tough-as-nails swordswoman that she was, he had a feeling she would be more like Yukimura.

"And what's wrong if I _do?_ Even though she claims she's been to a dojo to learn to use her short sword, it's clearly been a while since she's trained. She's hesitant to fight." Kawa's defense stirred him from his thought train. She lowered her scowling gaze and folded her arms at her chest. "She's not like me." She added on a more subdued tone.

Souji's lips pursed at her melancholic frown, instinctively raising a hand to place his arm around her shoulders, watching her look up at him as he spared her a soft smile. "Ne, Hajime-kun ya should know by now our princess ain't so dainty." He chided his old friend lightly.

Saitou noted her moment of sadness faded instantly when the brunette gave her a smile meant only for her, not really finding much room to argue her last comment.

She had indeed told him about her childhood, how she picked up the sword to defy what people thought of her, how she became the strong woman she was via hard training and sheer determination. He _did_ have to admit he admired her strength, inner and outer; maybe he wouldn't mention it to her thoughâ€|

She _did_ tend to take advantage of praise if she felt like doing so; _that_ he blamed on Souji one-hundred percent.

So he nodded slightly, a ghost-smile forming. "If anything, Kawa-chan is clearly the opposite." He mused, perking her ears.

Kawa blinked and then she smiled slowly, nodding. "Right." _Saitou-kun, chivalry doesn't die with you, does it?_ She mused, instinctively squeezing Souji's hand in hers.

:::::lDl:::::

Souji clicked his tongue at the impending fight on the bridge, "Cripes, _now?_" He grumbled, looking at his companion. "Keep an eye on her." He instructed, turning to assess the situation.

Kawa shook her head as she turned to jog after the younger girl's trail to Masuya, opening the door flap just in time to see one ronin converging on Chizuru with his sword drawn. "Damn!" Katana flying from the scabbard, she caught the man's descending blade quickly, a metallic '_klang_' ringing out.

Cracking open an eye from having flinched at the threat, Chizuru perked up to see the older girl standing in the way with her katana drawn and held fast by her left hand's grip, right hand extended to block her from harm and keeping the ronin away from his original intentions. "K-Kawa-chan!" She gaped.

Teeth gritted, Kawa's steely gray eyes narrowed as she punted the ronin away momentarily, slashing sharply so a diagonal gash appeared across the man's torso; she hummed as she straightened her stance when the ronin fell at her feet, gauging the gawking stares on the rest of his party of three (four if she considered the shop's host). "Don't tell me your balls dropped, ladies!" She drawled coolly, smiling in anticipation.

It was about time she got to see some action; she'd been feeling rusty as of lateâ€|

"Bitch!" A second ronin and third ronin flew at her, jerking her from her thoughts.

"Look out!" Chizuru barked behind her.

A loud 'klang' hummed in the air as a katana was knocked clean out of its wielder's grasp and sent flying to clatter on the cold floor.

Okita Souji's face was stony, his green eyes deadly. "Ne, why didn't ya invite me to the party, Kawa?" He hummed jovially, his gaze never leaving the ronin he'd rendered defenseless.

Kawa huffed as she smirked coldly into the angered brown eyes of the ronin whose katana she'd blocked with her own. "It was last-minute, love!" She replied in the same light tone.

"Okita-san!" Chizuru said in relief behind the couple.

At seeing the rest of his squad coming in to offer support, Kawa punted the katana from the ronin's hand, letting the lesser-ranked soldiers arrest him and his cohorts. "I could've handled it." She mused to the brunette, pouting childishly at him as he lowered his sword and she did the same.

Souji smiled cheekily at her pout, poking her nose. "Not ta burst your bubble, princess, but neither of ya have luck. 'Course, that goes for the rest of us as well." He mused, chuckling when she wrinkled her nose reflexively.

* * *

><p>AN**: lol sorry for the lengthy chapters, guys. kinda making up for not updating faster i suppose. anyway~

quick note, i just ****HAD**** to include the bonus OVA special from the anime in this chapter. and given it occurs while San'nan-san still has his arm in a sling, ontop of it occurring one month (give or take) prior to the Ikedaya raid, i felt it fit nicely into the timeline. Souji's expression in the first clip of the special was so adorable (that or i need help bc he was wielding a cleaver in the same instance.. orz); that's my main reason, i'm done and here's the next chapter. so bleh~ d: and yeah, some Saitou and Kawa bonding moments. just a reminder, this fic is strictly SoujiOC as the main pairing, so don't you go getting any ideas now! lD also, it wouldn't surprise me if cats ****did**** like oni (especially a certain oni-fukucho~ /brick'd). i lol'd when rewatching the last scene where Chizuru smacked her forehead on the windowsill that was too cute. xD ok now i'm done.

feel free to give some feedback, folks! i don't bite.. much~ ;D
chapter three might be shorter than this one, not sure, but who
knows? anyway, again, feel free to review and let me know if this
sucks or if you just love it to death. lates!

3. Blades

**Blades**

* * *

><p>"By imperial decree, everyone here is under arrest!" Kondou
exclaimed loudly just as well over ten ronin barreled out of the
rooms on the second floor to skid to a halt on the landing and take
in the sight of the sky blue Shinsengumi coats. "We won't hold back
on anyone who resists!" He vowed.<p>

Kawa couldn't hold back an excited grin as two or three ronin drew
their swords and charged downstairs at them, taking off after Souji,
Shinpachi and Heisuke as Kondou commanded they cut them down.
"Gladly." She mused, swinging her katana sharply as she cut down the
first ronin that attacked her, letting him fall and blocking the
second one on reflex, landing a well-placed kick in his gut that
knocked him back; blood flew just as she ripped his throat
open.

"Bitch!" Another ronin cried as he flew at her, swinging sword
missing just as she dodged, slashing another two times before a
katana stabbed into his chest from behind.

Souji yanked his arm back to let the ronin drop at his feet, huffing.
"Didn't mind his whereabouts." He mused blandly, smirking at her, at
the smudged blood on her left cheek and some staining her haori.
"Ya look beautiful with blood on you." He mused, the smirk widening a
smidge.

Kawa smirked warmly at him, blinking as a ronin rushed him from
behind, "Move!" She yanked him forward by his sleeve and stabbed into
the ronin's chest, kicking him away. "Geez, they're worse than
insects!" She grumbled as he backed into her with his sword bared,
baring her own blade as another two ronin circled them.

A loud battle-cry sounded as Shinpachi slashed into one of the two on
her side, surprising her momentarily, before she kicked the second
one at him only to let him be skewered by the blue-eyed captain's
katana. "You two done making out?" Shinpachi asked cheekily, smirking
at her.

Souji ripped the throat open of another ronin that made to attack him
from the left, huffing. "If we weren't cuttin' up ronin left and
right, I'd clock ya for that one, Shinpatsu." He hummed, smirking
back.

Kawa shook her head at the two brunettes, blinking when she noticed
Heisuke paving a way to the second floor; she sighed. "C'mon, Souji!
Thanks for the help, Shinpatsu!" She sprinted forward to converge on
the ronin that were most likely hiding upstairs, Souji closely
following.

"At this rate, we'll finish up here long before Hijikata-san comes!" Heisuke mused lightly as he cut down the last ronin in his way.

"One side, _bozu!_" Souji sang as he led the way upstairs with Kawa at his heels, surprising the younger captain.

"O-oi, that's cheating Souji!" Heisuke yelled as he hurried after the couple.

Kawa launched herself at the three ronin that flew at her from one of the rooms, kicking one out of the way as she cut down two of the three with ease, skirting out of the way as the third lunged at her only to be cut down by Souji.

Heisuke took down another four as Souji and Kawa tag-teamed on the remaining three, leaving the floor void of life save them.

Souji glanced at the duo with him to see they both were fine and he moved towards the last door, cracking it open a smidge; he perked up when noting the room wasn't vacantâ€¦ not that he hoped it would be.

Two men remained in the back room overlooking the backyard of the inn, the one seated on the windowsill sporting blonde hair and a casual _kosode_ with a katana at his left hip. The one standing near him looked tall, proddy taller than Sano, with short red hair clad in navy blue clothes.

The tall redhead caught sight of the captain's green stare and held it in his icy blue, noting the second and third members of the captain's party, instantly recognizing their sky blue coats, somehow surprised the middle member of the group was a woman.

Souji gripped the hilt of his katana, subliminally stating they were there for their heads.

Kawa narrowed her eyes and glanced between the taller man to the blonde, gray eyes steely.

:::::lDl:::::

Heisuke grimaced as he lifted his head from having been thrown into the flimsy door, teal eyes angered.

The redhead lowered his raised hands, perking up as the swordswoman swung sharply at his left arm, dodging and snatching her scruff just as she lunged again, tossing her aside so her back hit the wall.

"Bastard!" Heisuke growled, perking up as the man raised a hand as if to placate the tension.

"You don't have to fight me, for I have no intention of killing you." He stated, slightly surprising the young captain.

"Then what the hell're ya doing here if not to kill?" Kawa spat as she straightened steadily, glaring at him with cold gray eyes.

The man spared her a look before resuming his stare-on with Heisuke,

"I won't hurt either of you if you pull back now." He answered.

Heisuke huffed and smirked humorlessly, "Sorry, but neither of us are gonna let ya leave so easily. I personally won't let a Choshu bastard like you get in my way!" He lashed out swiftly only to have his blade caught in the taller man's bare hand, surprising both he and Kawa.

The redhead's brow furrowed into a deep frown as the captain tried to yank his blade free, muscles tensing in his free hand's fist before he plowed his fist hard into the brunette's forehead, sending him flying back.

"Heisuke!" Kawa rushed to defend him, katana bared. "You overgrown sunnuvaâ€¦" She began; _whoever he is, __**whatever**__ he is, he's obviously not some pushover_, she mused grimly.

"Instead of getting angered with me for defending myself, you should check on your companion in the next room." The man cut her off, surprising the swordswoman.

Narrowing her glaring gray eyes, she huffed. "And why's that?" She demanded.

"If Kazama has his way with him, he'll be dead soon." He answered, watching horror glint in her slightly-widened eyes. He turned to leave via the windowsill, leaving the silent tension in his wake.

"Soujiâ€¦" She spared a glance at Heisuke's unconscious form and then clicked her tongue, hurrying to the brunette's aid.

The blonde narrowly dodged a lunge from his opponent, aiming to kick him in the gut had he not dodged his attack, swinging his katana sharply at him.

Souji slashed viciously at him, blade glancing off his; he stabbed at where his heart was and perked up as the man caught his blade under his arm.

"**Souji**!" A short sword was thrown forward, narrowly missing their heads as it stabbed into the wall behind the blonde.

The blonde skirted out of the way of a streak of blue and black that made to crash into him, standing in front of the windowsill with his katana held tight.

"Kawaâ€¦ Idiot, where's Heisuke?" Souji asked sharply as she extended her arm in front of him, left hand wielding her katana.

"I'll explain later, just let me handle him." Kawa answered quietly.

"Oh, so you wolves were protecting a brash woman like her in your pack, were you?" The blonde drawled coolly, earning a green-eyed glare from the brunette.

Kawa huffed and smirked humorlessly, "I'm as much of a wolf as they areâ€¦ Ya try coming at him again, pretty boy, and I'll rip your

throat open." She promised, lunging sharply, her katana clashing with his own, the blades screeching shrilly.

He pressed his weight onto the connected blades, forcing her back, but for her heels firmly dug into the floor, she remained resilient. "Tough words for such a weak woman." He sneered, gauging her flashing gray eyes, his red eyes daunting.

"Aren't you adorable." She bit out, headbutting his forehead and forcing him away, right leg flying to kick him sharply in the gut and knock him back. "You're looking at the She-Wolf of the Shinsengumi, Hijikata Yasakawa!" She stated proudly, gray eyes smug at having forced him off.

The blonde rubbed his forehead gingerly with the back of his hand, teeth gritted as he glowered at the insolent swordswoman. "That name surely explains the atrocity that is your existence!" He caught her as she snarled and flew forward, their blades clashing and disconnecting as one combatant made to rip the other to ribbons, locked in a deadly dance.

Left heel locking with her right ankle, the blonde yanked sharply, knocking her legs from under her so her back hit the floor. The blonde swung down on her head but was stopped by an unfamiliar katana, looking from the blade to the owner's steely green stare.

"Souji?" She panted slightly, backing away to get to her feet as he extended his left arm defensively in front of her.

"Ya can try to kill me any day, but insult my woman and I'll kill you first." Souji vowed coldly, a dangerous light brightening his jade green glare.

The blonde huffed and smirked coldly at his words, taking further note of the silence that had swept the downstairs scene of carnage as it had spread to the second floor. He surprised both of them as he turned about to sheathe his katana. "You can keep your worthless bitch." He hummed coolly as he moved towards the windowsill.

"Oi what gives?" Souji growled, making him pause short of leaving.

The ronin glanced over his shoulder at him, red eyes stony. "My job ended the second your pack of wolves burst in so rudely." He answered, turning his head forward as he left into the darkness.

Kawa glared at his exit, shoulders slumping with a sigh she didn't realize she'd been withholding, sheathing her katana reluctantly and looking at the captain as he also sheathed his katana, shuffling to retrieve her thrown short sword, returning it to the scabbard at her right hip. "I didn't mean to interrupt the fight, I justâ€¦ Y'know." She offered, looking at the dark courtyard beyond the window and frowning.

"I know." Souji nodded, exhaling and settling for lightly cuffing her head, earning a mumbled '_ow_', before he pulled her into a tight embrace that made her squeak. "Dummy, even though ya acted like a badass and nearly got killed, yer still here. I'm glad for just

that." He said into her neck, feeling her stiffen in what he assumed was surprise.

Feeling her ears burn, Kawa closed her eyes and smiled, hugging him tightly. "Love you too." She said quietly, cheek resting on his shoulder.

"Souji, Yasakawa!" The two lovers pulled apart a smidge just as Toshi dashed in, seeming to have feared the worst judging by his tightened violet eyes.

Souji refrained from rolling his eyes and instead smiled in what one would say was elation for his safety, huffing. "Ne, talk about bein' rude, Hijikata-san!" He joked.

Toshi opened his mouth to berate him but thought better and instead closed it, shoulders slumping with a sigh. "You're both alright." He didn't ask them.

Kawa ignored the rosy color of her cheeks, nodding with a likewise sigh. "We're fine. Is everyone alright elsewhere?" She replied, momentarily thinking about how she'd left Heisuke in the other room.

"Except for Heisuke, yeah." Toshi nodded, frowning at the thought of the unconscious captain.

Souji sighed, "Dumbass, that don't surprise me. Well, Mr. Worry-wart, ya ruined the moment so there's nothin' to do except go back home." He mused sulkily, pouting.

The older Hijikata deadpanned and then shook his head. "Only a year with Kawa and you're obeying orders _so_ willingly." He remarked with a bemused expression.

The swordswoman caught the twitch in his brow and she laughed softly, detangling from his embrace save his left hand she kept in her own grip. "C'mon, O Great Samurai, I'm sure the others are wondering about us." She urged patiently, letting her '_brother_' lead the way as she and the brunette followed shortly.

* * *

><p>Toshi rolled his eyes as the swordswoman made a disgusted noise after downing the medicine, gulping down her tea heartily.<p>

"I told you, it was just a scratch!" Kawa griped as she wiped her mouth with the side of her arm, scowling at him.

"Well knowin' how much of a worry-wart Hijikata-san is, s' only fair ta force the medicine on you." Souji reminded dryly from her left.

"Like you don't worry _too_, dummy." Kawa huffed, kneeing his shin pointedly.

"Is this medicine specially prescribed?" Chizuru wondered aloud as she looked at one package of the medicine, looking at the captains.

Sano shrugged, "You could say that."

Souji glanced at the older Hijikata, "Hijikata-san's family specializes in it."

Heisuke nodded if only to explain better to his age-mate, "Yep, the pain from cuts and bruises evaporates when ya take some Ishida Sanyaku! Down the trap it goes! Who knows if it'll work!" He muttered the last sentence as he downed the powdered medicine, grimacing and shuddering at the horrid taste. "Blegh, it's gross!"

Brow twitching dangerously, Toshi raised a balled fist, "You wanna test it out?" He demanded lowly.

"E-eh, no way! It'd be really lame if I ended up gettin' hurt again!" Heisuke yelped as he flailed, earning a few laughs from those in the circle.

Inoue-san relented, "I'm still surprised they injured Todou-kun and nearly got Okita-kun and Yasakawa-kun."

Souji huffed, "Like he's gonna win next time we meet."

Kawa sipped her tea. "Damn coward." She murmured.

"Didn't they say that they weren't associated with Choshu?" Saitou asked the trio, earning three nods. "Yet they held a secret meeting at Ikedaya! Maybe they were working for another clan." He pondered.

Sano looked at him, "Then what were they after?" He asked, seeing his fellow captain shake his head.

* * *

><p>AN**: hm maybe i jinxed it in the previous A/N when mentioning this chapter would be shorter than the previous two chaps.. orz..

>so yes, this was moreso an action-y chapter muchly thanks to the Ikedaya Raid. quick note, i'm including the Sekkaroku OVA in this fic, but that chapter will come up soon. chapter four is in the works, so don't fret.

srsly, _no_ reviews? what's up guys? Dx

4. Flags

Flags

* * *

><p>The soldier scoffed, "The Shinsengumi was ordered to join the Aizu Clan on standby?" Consulting his comrade at his left, he shook his head and added coolly, "Sorry, never got wind of it; you'd better discuss this with our clan leaders."<p>

"Not _twice_ in one friggin' day!" She growled under her breath, hands formed into fists at her sides as the momentary idea of

slugging such a snobby foot-soldier entertained her for that one moment.

The second division captain strode forward, biting out annoyedly, "Your leaders just told us to get the hell over here!"

The first division captain hummed mildly, "This's so annoying. Get yer heads on straight, will ya?" He declared, brow slightly twitching as he looked at the soldiers with stoic green eyes.

Their commander placed a placating hand up to prevent either captains from saying more, looking at the soldiers. "Would you please fetch your superiors?" He asked, keeping his tone of politeness even though the rest of his party was otherwise frustrated.

Hesitating to fire back a snarky comment at him, the soldier who'd spoken gauged the frustrated glares filled with daggers that put the term '_if looks could kill_' to shame; he huffed in reluctant defeat and nodded, sending the soldier on his left to do as asked.

Once both Toshi and Kondou had gained an audience with the head of the Aizu party, the rest of the Shinsengumi members took refuge around small campfires that were near the Aizu tent as the day gave way to twilight.

"â€¦ I think the Aizu forces here are being treated more like reserves than actual combat force. Their main forces are keeping watch over the Hamaguri Gate." Inoue-san mused aloud to Saitou, Sano, Souji, Shinpachi, Kawa and Chizuru as they were huddled around a small fire.

Chizuru raised both brows, "So do they intend to treat the Shinsengumi the same, as reserves?" She asked.

"So it would seem." Inoue-san nodded.

Kawa shot a scowl at the tent, "I'd _love_ to hope not, or my foot's gonna go up their leader's ass for being such a bastard." She said bitingly.

"Get in line." Shinpachi huffed, sharing a slight smirk with the swordswoman.

Saitou rolled his eyes, "At this rate, I doubt you'd meet much resistance on that front." He offered.

Souji scritch'd the back of his head aimlessly, "So what the hell happened to _us_ bein' called because it was such a big _emergency?_" He wondered, scowling slightly at the fire.

Kawa sighed, "It wouldn't surprise me if we had to head out to the battlefield at any given momentâ€¦" She mused, resting her head on Souji's shoulder.

Sano rolled his eyes at the fond glance she earned from her lover, throwing a look at the quieted Chizuru, smirking. "Ne, Chizuru, let me know if ya get tired, I wouldn't mind lettin' you sleep on my lap." He said with a teasing light on his handsome face.

Cheeks coloring a shade of pink, the younger girl looked away shyly.

"I-I'll be fine!" She assured.

Souji smirked amusedly at the flustered girl, folding an instinctive arm around his lover's shoulders. "Ne, Sano-san, what happened to yer sense of chivalry?" He teased.

"Kinda hard to keep it up with two beautiful girls in our midst, Souji." Shinpachi remarked with a chuckle, only making the younger girl blush again.

Kawa shook her head as the three brunette captains chuckled. "That's sweet of ya, Shinpatsu, but I'm happily taken." She stated, nudging the youngest brunette with her elbow.

"Like that speaks for both girls." Sano rolled his eyes again.

Saitou shook his head at the trio's antics, staring at the fire. "I don't believe flustering Yukimura or Kawa-chan is part of 'waiting for orders'." He pointed out.

Chizuru blinked at his basic defense of both she and her roommate, smiling slightly when his words quieted both Shinpachi and Sano. "Thank you, Saitou-san." She said.

Kawa yawned slightly and held onto Souji's sleeve out of habit, "Sano's chivalry was passed on to a more promising swordsman." She hummed, smirking cheekily when noting her fellow lefty's cheeks tinge a shade of pink.

Souji pouted at her, pinching her cheek and making her grumble an 'ow'. "Shouldn't ya be sleeping?" He sniffed, knowing she didn't feel anything for Saitou aside from friendship, but even so, she was still ****his**** lover.

Saitou huffed, "Souji's got a point, you should get some sleep." Instead of heckling me at this hour, he silently added, looking at the fire pointedly.

Kawa rolled her eyes and sighed in defeat, "You two are no fun!" She said sulkily, snuggling closer to Souji even as his arm squeezed on her back and she closed her eyes.

* * *

><p>Saitou scowled slightly at the barking match going on between both clan members that were protecting the 5th Gate. "Both the Satsuma and Aizu clans' bickering is only making them look foolish."<p>

Souji poked his ear with a pinkie, "Cripes, they're bein' annoying."

The head of the Satsuma pack noted the blue coats and huffed, saying loudly, "Ne, don't tell me your Shinsengumi friends are here to back you up. I'm shocked you let that pack of loser-mongrels in your ranks; the Aizu Clan must be full with so many damn cowards. It's almost a shame that you're friends with such lame-ass ronin!" He smirked arrogantly.

Kawa bristled slightly at his insult and huffed, smirking. "Like Satsuma's got the ****balls**** to go against the Choshu dogs!" She drawled, arms crossed at her chest, gauging the annoyed and outraged glares from said clan's forces. "I'm surprised you lot got off your lazy asses to actually give a damn about meager threats to the Emperor." She said.

Souji felt like slapping his forehead, even though his chest swelled with something he could only assume was pride at seeing his lover, the Shinsengumi's She-Wolf, defending their pride— even if they were all going to get their asses chewed out later by Hijikata-san.

"Bitch, watch your mouth! Don't tell me the Shinsengumi sank even lower and started recruiting brash insolent women like you—" The main Satsuma soldier snapped bitingly, glaring at her.

"You can call me whatever the hell you want, you weak dog— If you dare insult the Shinsengumi name again, you'll be lucky if you can breathe after I kick your ass." Kawa promised frostily, a glare similar to a certain oni's gracing her pretty face as she held the soldier's glare in her own, standing her full height.

"Hijikata-san, that's enough." Saitou placed a hand on her shoulder from the side, earning a brief scowl from the woman, before he looked at the Satsuma forces with cold blue eyes. "We did not come here to start squabbles with the Satsuma Clan, if you recall. Focus on the task we were ordered to do." He reproached calmly.

Kawa spared the Satsuma forces a final dagger-filled glare before obeying. "Right." She muttered, trudging to stand near Souji.

"Smart move, putting your bitch back in her cage!" The Satsuma soldier jeered, making her pause.

Souji grabbed her wrist to keep her from lashing out at the soldier just as one of the Aizu drew his katana out of frustration at the front.

The Satsuma soldier made to draw his own sword had a large gloved hand stopped him; both parties balked slightly at the tall redhead that had stayed the soldier's blade, his icy blue stare fixed on the Shinsengumi members.

Souji stiffened slightly at recognizing the behemoth, a cold smirk gracing his features. "Well, look who's here—" He mused lowly, earning a look from his lover before she turned to see where he was looking.

Kawa tensed as her thumb instinctively pushed the blade of her katana out, gray eyes narrowing. "Like today couldn't get any crappier." She scoffed.

Saitou reprimanded the Aizu soldier that made to strike the behemoth, blue eyes stoic as he held up his sheathed katana. "That wouldn't be such a wise idea, given the gap between you two is spaced." He mused, surprising the soldier.

Souji and Kawa moved closer to back up their friend, both green and

gray stares set on the redhead.

"I must apologize for the commotion we caused at Ikedaya. Is the injury to the boy's forehead healing well?" The redhead asked the trio, namely the couple, slightly taking the third division captain off guard. "Please let him know I'm sorry that I didn't hold back."

Kawa huffed. "Depends if your friend's pride healed after that night." She returned stiffly.

"Fate must have a whacked sense of humor, seeing you again." Souji chimed, the cold smirk never leaving.

Saitou huffed as well even though his jaw tensed, "So you're the one who injured Todou. That makes senseâ€|" His blue eyes turned cold as he added, "As I suspected, the Satsuma Clan sent you as a spy that night to see what Choshu was up to." He slightly surprised Souji and Kawa as he drew his katana and pointed it directly at the redhead's jugular. "The Shinsengumi has a problem with you; to be frank, I see you as the reason for Todou's vengeance." He stated coldly.

"Saitou-kunâ€|" Kawa began quietly, glancing between them both, her left hand gripping the hilt of her sword; she saw what that man did to Heisuke, and given Saitou was just as old as the absent captainâ€| Her jaw tensed.

"And yet I don't have any strife against the Shinsengumi at the moment." The redhead pointed out.

Souji scowled at him with stoic green eyes, "Tch, if yer not willin' to fight, then we've got no reason to cause trouble. We came here just to guard the gate, not scuffle with you lot. Our objectives are the same, ain't they?" He reasoned with a hard edge to his voice, keeping one hand on the hilt of his katana just in case, not minding the surprised glances from both left-handed swordsmen at his strangely calm rationality. "I'll admit though, fer your own sakes, if ya insult the Shinsengumi again, we and our dear friends from Aizu will hafta kill you. Got it?"

Gauging the steely glint in the brunette's stare that promised death on his part if he tried to turn on them when they were coming to a reluctant truce, the tall redhead nodded slightly. "Given that it was our fault that the scuffle began, I apologize on behalf of the Satsuma Clan." He looked at the three of them, namely the blue-eyed captain that reluctantly sheathed his katana. "I also didn't intend for a fight to go down, so I'm glad you decided to stand down." He bowed slightly to the trio. "My name is Amagiri Kyuuju, and I pray the next time we meet, that we'll be in a situation where we can help one another." He turned to leave the scene, walking through the throng of Satsuma soldiers that made a way for his exit.

Saitou stared at his retreating back, "Amagiri Kyuujuâ€| I thought for a second that he would back down if I threatened him with my sword." He muttered.

Kawa exhaled through her nostrils, scowling reprovably at her friend. "You're lucky he wasn't in a fighting mood today; you saw what he did to Heisuke, imagine it happening to either of youâ€|" Her

gray eyes tightened in revulsion and worry, looking away.

Souji gauged her frowning face and exhaled, instinctively tousling her hair. "Like that'd happen without a fight, princess." He remarked, winking when she opened her mouth to add something.

Smiling briefly at her worries being placated, Saitou huffed. "Souji's right, it would take more than someone like him to give us cause for concern."

"Ne, so you got any bright ideas on where the hell the Satsuma picked up that freak?" Souji wondered of his fellow captain as the Satsuma forces were trailing behind the redhead's leave.

Kawa huffed, "Whatever he is, he'll have to own up for screwing with us." She mused quietly.

Saitou nodded, "Regardless, it appears the Satsuma have some dangerous allies with them." He chimed.

* * *

><p>AN**: yo sorry for the prolonged update! i'm going to put out ch.5 too in a second, so hope this'll make up for my not updating sooner /bows
>elsewise, thanks to Dragonmaster789 for reviewing and **Vivid x Dream** for the fav/follow. anyway, again, ch.5 will be out shortly!

5. Loyalties

**Loyalties**

* * *

><p>Why did she let him cookâ€|?<p>

Sighing, Kawa finished cooking the fish and shook her head at the fact that she might've caused chaos due to letting a certain cat-samurai cook dinner, namely the vegetables. She perked up as Saitou, Sano and Toshi filed into the kitchen just then with their bowls on hand, making a beeline for the water basin.

"Um, is there a problemâ€|?" The swordswoman wondered confusedly as all three men began trying to rinse their vegetables, distinctly feeling a sweatdrop form on her brow.

"They're just bein' babies about my cookin' the vegetables with soy sauce." Souji said sulkily as he trailed in after the trio, skirting around Sano to also rinse his food.

Kawa giggled in spite of his sullen expression, patting his back. "Maybe next time you'll let me help you with the vegetables, Souji." She mused.

"Kawa-chan, why didn't ya say _you_ were cooking?" Sano asked, having caught whiff of the cooked fish, looking at her with hopeful gold eyes.

Smiling sheepishly, she noted both Saitou and Toshi looked in her direction as she said, "I know, I knowâ€| Grab your bowls and get some food, go on." She sighed, stepping aside as Sano was the first to converge on the food.

Souji pouted sulkily, miffed with his cooking disaster. "I don't know whether to be grateful for you bein' one hell of a cook or to be annoyed that my plan to cook backfiredâ€|" He grumbled.

Kawa smiled softly at his sulky pout and giggled, leaning up to kiss him gently. "Just ask if you want help next time, alright?" She waggered, gray eyes sympathetic and soft at the same time.

Pout shifting to a small smile, Souji nodded slightly and kissed back. "Did I mention ya were a lifesaver?" He returned, earning a chuckle.

"If you two are done, there's still some fish and vegetables left." Toshi informed blandly from the doorway, deadpanning at their open affection.

Souji 'humphed' at his intrusion and ambled over to get some food; Kawa ignored the heat in her cheeks at having her 'brother' watch them, following shortly.

* * *

><p>"Ya know it's too cold to practice so early," he pointed out as he watched her swing her sword out sharply from the left, arms folded over his chest.<p>

She drew her arm back, her right hand moving to grip the black hilt just as securely as her left hand did, huffing just as a soft billow of semi-translucent air escaped her lips. "It's either getting warmed up training or freeze where I sit." She remarked calmly, slashing into the gut of her invisible foe, flicking her wrist to cleanse the blade of invisible blood.

Souji puffed his cheeks out slightly, shrugging his katana into the crook of his left shoulder on habit. "I can think of other things that'd keep ya warm so early in the dayâ€|" He mused aloud, perking her ears as she sheathed her katana.

Cheeks coloring pink, Kawa noted his puffed cheeks and instead of scolding him, a giggle escaped. Shaking her head, she shuffled to hop onto the porch with him. "You're cheekier than usual, something up?" She wondered aloud, stroking his cheek gently.

Souji smirked softly at her gesture, squeezing her hand on his cheek. "What a thing to accuse me of, princessâ€|" He said.

"**Souji**." She gave him a stubborn look that he knew well by now.

Sighing, he placed his arm around her, left hand's fingers playing with idle locks of her black hair. "Itou-san tried to come onto Chizuru-chan the other night, just because she's prettyâ€| Okay, cute in my book, but the point is that it pissed me off to see him pull that not even a day after he just joined us." He explained

quietly, knowing her leniency towards her fellow female, even so much as feeling the part of an older sister to her, especially so because she stiffened slightly in his grasp.

She gripped the black scabbard of her katana positioned in her lap, gray eyes tightening minutely at the snowy ground. "Slippery bastard." She murmured.

Souji squeezed on her back reflexively, huffing before an idea came to mind; he smiled privately, releasing her to get up, leave his katana on the porch and put on his sandals as he stepped onto the snowy ground, noting her surprised and confused look. "Y'know, you're right about keepin' warm by movin' aroundâ€¦" He reached to gather a small ball of snow in his hand, a wicked grin gracing his handsome features as realization dawned on her face as she put her sword down.

"You're not seriousâ€¦" Kawa managed to get out before his snowball hit her right in the face, making her yelp as she fell back. Hurriedly wiping the slush from her face, she heard him laughing which only served to fuel her surge of vengeance and excitement. "Bastard, you're dead!" She vowed, scrambling off the porch to start flinging snow at him.

Grinning once he dodged some of her rebuttal, Souji snickered. "Ne, why so serious, princessâ€¦?" He began when getting hit smack-dab in the nose with a snowball.

Kawa laughed with a wide smile on her face as she readied another snowball, gray eyes playful and smug. "Too slow, kitten!" She sang, yelping as he threw another snowball and dancing out of the way, flinging her own projectile at him, hitting him square in the shoulder. "One in~!" She cheered lightly, giggling and dodging another snowball.

Souji readied a second snowball as he threw the first at her to make her duck, tossing the second that hit her in the face again that made her yelp before he crashed into her, laughing even as she squirmed and tried to kick him off as their horseplay turned into a small scuffle.

Panting from fighting with him, Kawa grinned from her position of being pinned with her right knee wedged between his gut and left thigh, her fingers pulling his cheeks out, and she giggled at his expression. "Dummy." She chided in a breath, forfeiting reluctantly as she let go of his face and lowered her knee, head drooping into the snow with a laugh.

Smirking contently, he relaxed slightly so he still towered over her on his hands and knees, panting as well. "You've got snow in your hair, princess." He chuckled, brushing some of her bangs back, watching her slightly rosy cheeks redden at his gesture.

Smiling softly, Kawa kissed his nose and chuckled at his childish pout, meeting his green eyes warmly.

Souji held her stare and smiled a true smile he rarely showed, lips pressing against hers slowly, feeling her stiffen momentarily before she reciprocated with a grin on her soft lips.

Curling her fingers in his brown hair, she blushed slightly when the kiss deepened, her fingers tugging at his shaggy locks on reflex, hearing him mumble an '_ow_' as he broke the kiss to breathe, cheeks slightly rosy from the cold (she hoped, leastways).

Kawa giggled softly at his softened expression, tracing her fingers gingerly along his jawline, blinking when he caught her hand and held it in his calloused hand's grip, squeezing. "Souji." She murmured.

Souji smirked slightly at the semi-confused light in her gray eyes, kissing her softly and entwining his fingers with hers, letting her squeeze. "Love you, Kawa." He squeezed her hand.

Blushing softly at his open declaration, her gray eyes warmed and she smiled happily. "Love you too, Souji."

* * *

><p>"Thanks again for the help, Kawa-chan." Chizuru smiled lightly at her companion as they both walked down the porch bearing tea.<p>

Kawa shrugged and returned the smile, "Don't mention it. The boys were gonna have some important meeting and forgot to invite me, I guess." She mused wryly.

As the brunette started to question why the swordswoman had been left out of the proverbial loop, both girls heard a familiar angered outburst from the confines of the meeting room, "What the hell're you saying, Itou-san!"

Chizuru winced slightly at the loudness; Kawa's jaw tensed and she lifted a hand to shush the girl, lowering to a crouch to not only show she was eavesdropping but so she could hear better as she pressed her ear to the flimsy shoji panel.

The older Hijikata sounded like Itou-san had ruffled his feathers, "Although you're right about San'nan-san's sharp mind, he's still invaluable to the Shinsengumi as a swordsman!"

Faintly she could hear said man speak of his bum arm, seeming to quiet his fellow vice-commander. Her brow furrowed into a scowl when the weasel that'd opened his big mouth then said in an innocent tone, "Oops, did I say something wrong? I truly hope your arm feels better, San'nan-san!"

Chizuru blinked when the older girl stood to her feet to open the door and, judging by her annoyed scowl, she looked like she was going to give that man a piece of her mind. "K-Kawa-chan!" She began, perking up when the door opened from the inside, making them both blink.

San'nan-san stood there in the doorway, looking at both women, one sporting a look of surprise and confusion whereas the other had a mutinous glare fixated on the literal thorn in his side. A bitter smile splayed on his face as he walked past both girls and mused aloud, "I suppose they don't need me now that they've got such a talented adviser!"

Kawa watched him leave with tightened gray eyes before she inhaled to try and calm her nerves, ushering the younger girl into the room. "We brought tea." She announced in a mild tone, her voice surprisingly calm, as she helped her hand out the cups.

Toshi briefly caught sight of the tightened jawline on his 'sister's pretty face, closing his eyes even with his brow furrowed as he took a cup from Chizuru.

"Hijikata-kun, I had no idea your sister was so lovely." Itou-san commented as she handed him a cup, smiling at the woman.

Souji swallowed a growl bubbling to the surface; Toshi's violet eyes cracked open stiffly at his words.

Kawa bit her tongue and stomached a forced smile. "Thank you, Itou-san." She said politely, handing the last cup to Shinpachi and straightening with the tray tucked under her left arm.

"Yasakawa, shouldn't you two get dinner started?" Toshi asked, earning a glance from Souji and Kondou.

"Right! Well, see you later, everyone. C'mon, Chizuru-chan," Kawa nodded curtly, shuffling to leave the room first with Chizuru closely following.

Chizuru looked at the older girl as they were already in the kitchen when she rested her back against the wall by the doorway with a sigh she seemed to have been holding in. "Kawa-chan, are you alright?" She asked.

"You're cutting the vegetables today; if I get that knife in my hand, wellâ€¦" Kawa's joke was mildly threatening, but her hardened gray eyes said otherwise.

Looking back the way they'd come, the younger girl frowned and let her friend get herself together. "I'm sure things will be alright, between Itou-san and Hijikata-san, Kawa-chan. It's probably nothing!" She assured, trying to be of some help to alleviate the older girl's worries.

She quieted at being reassured of things from the younger girl, putting the vegetables down on the counter with a wry half-laugh. "As much as I want to hope for thatâ€¦ I know it's not. But I know Toshi pretty well to not delude myself." She looked at her concerned brown stare and smiled brightly. "I'll be alright, Chizuru. Thanks for trying to help." She added.

The furrow in her brow faded when seeing a bright smile form on the older girl's face. "So, how exactly do you prepare pickled radish?" She asked to change subject.

Despite her assuring smile, Chizuru knew Kawa was lying.

:::::lDl:::::

"That ass hat Itou really pisses me off! He's so slippery." Sano groused with a scoff.

Shinpachi huffed his agreement, "tell me about it; s' like he's so damn arrogant and lording his status over everyone."

Souji commented, "I don't particularly like the weasel, either; he's not half-bad as a swordsman, though."

Kawa snorted in an unladylike manner. "I can't see him lifting a sword, much less wantin' to break a nail. He's so repugnant."

Toshi gave a half-laugh at her comment, "I'm surprised you _didn't_ slap him for opening his big mouth at the meeting." He caught her slightly surprised gray stare, recognition for her feelings towards said man showing in his violet glance.

Sano shot a look at the woman, "The '_lovely sister_' of Hijikata-san bitch-slapping that weasel woulda been something to see." He chimed.

"Knowin' our She-Wolf, she woulda done _much_ worse." Shinpachi mused.

Kawa chuckled at their comments, lifting a leg to press her foot sole against the post on her right side. "If it's one thing I've learned, it's that decorum was still in place." She pointed out.

"**Screw decorum**." Souji and Toshi scoffed in unison. The latter huffed, "Regardless, I honestly don't trust 'im."

The former rolled his eyes at the older man's simple comment, "Then send 'im away, Hijikata-san; just tell the weasel that the Shinsengumi don't need asshats like him." He remarked.

Toshi scoffed, "Like that'd ever happen; you _know_ Kondou-san just _adores_ him." He said in disgust.

Kawa scowled slightly at the reminder; "Yer hopeless, y'know that? In these situations, it's yer job as the infamous _Oni-Fukuchou_ to _make_ the impossible happen." Souji complained.

"Then why the hell don't _you_ be the vice-commander, Souji?" Toshi snapped grouchy, scowling at the younger man.

Souji laughed, "I'll hafta decline; it's too much of an annoying job, and anyway, I'd really not wanna be in your shoes. Couldn't enjoy life properly, either." He remarked jovially, looking at the swordswoman at his side as he brought up '_enjoying life properly_', tousling her hair affectionately.

Shinpachi rolled his eyes at the '_goo-goo eyes_' exchanged between the two lovers.

Chizuru glanced at her roommate as she seemed to be in chipper spirits compared to when the meeting happened, speaking up from standing near Shinpachi and Sano as she looked at Saitou lastly seeing as he had been silent through the entire conversation, "Saitou-san, do you also dislike Itou-san?" She asked.

Saitou answered calmly, "A group grows and expands when people with varied ideas join upâ€¦ But if diversification is forced, then it'll split apart." He didn't see the slight frown on the brunette girl's

face.

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><p>AN**: okay last chapter for tonight. please excuse your humble author as she goes to get some much-needed beauty sleep.. lates! hope to see more reviews~ lD

6. Honors

Honors

* * *

><p>"San'nan-san!"<p>

"Chizuru!"

Toshi slapped the short sword out of his grip as Souji, Saitou and Kawa rushed into the room shortly after him, the two captains restraining a struggling Rasetsu-turned San'nan-san; the older Hijikata perked up as the girl fainted, quickly catching her from falling. "Yasakawa, take her." He ordered, earning a nod as she shrugged the girl's weight onto her right shoulder.

Kawa winced when San'nan-san gave a vain snarl as he sank to the floor, from exhaustion if she had to guess; she looked at her old friend. "Toshi." She said concernedly.

Brow furrowing into his trademark scowl to hide the feelings steered at the now-unconscious Rasetsu, Toshi looked at Sano and Shinpachi. "Shinpachi, cover the Maekawa-tei Entrance; Harada, you take the Yagi-tei Entrance. Keep an eye on our soldiers; noone is to come near this room! Saitou, stand watch over the courtyard, make sure Itou-san and his comrades keep out of the area." He instructed, watching all three captains exit the scene to go to their appointed stations.

"If it's alright with you, Hijikata-san, I'll stick with San'nan-san." Souji offered.

"Soujiâ€|" Kawa began, slightly confused as to why he was willing to stay behind.

Toshi nodded, "Fine; tonight will be a major point in his life. Will he live, die, or go insaneâ€|?" Exhaling, he looked at the swordswoman, "Yasakawa, you're with me. Let's go." He didn't miss the worry rising in her eyes, seeing her nod slightly as they left the room.

"You should go back to bed, it'll be dawn soon." He advised once they had put the girl in his room for questioning once she awoke, looking at her roommate.

Kawa shook her head, "I'm fine, I'll stay awake the rest of the night. I don't mindâ€|" She mused.

"Don't be stupid; you can't stay up worrying about this, Yasakawa. I'm ordering you to go back to bed." Toshi stated firmly.

"I'm not leaving her behindâ€¦ Not until we find out what the hell happened to San'nan-san." She added the last bit softly, glaring at him with that stubborn scowl set on her brow.

He covered his brow with his hand, groaning in exasperation as it slid down his face. "Idiot, you shouldn't get attached so easily. As soon as we find her father, she's gone; that's it."

He wouldn't deny that she had trouble making friends, namely with other girls; he'd witnessed it since the day she'd picked up a sword. The girls her age ostracized her for being the stray that she was; he knew it well. Although she'd grown soft on Chizuru, he didn't want her to get mixed up in the girl's shadows.

He would protect her as if she truly was his sisterâ€¦ as he'd done since they were kids.

"The way things are going, it sure as hell doesn't sound like we're ever going to find her fatherâ€¦ She might be stuck with us for longer than you expected, Toshi." Kawa pointed out.

Scowling at the stinging reality she presented him with, Toshi folded his arms at his chest, exhaling. "When she wakes up, you're staying out here on standby. Interrogations are only between two people." He finalized.

Quieting, she nodded a little and slouched to sit down against the wall. "_Hai_."

:::::lDl:::::

All seven members of the room perked up when the back-door to the room opened and Souji stood there with an elated smile on his face.

"San'nan-san's okay." Souji announced, filing into the room with Inoue-san shortly following; Kawa smiled at him in relief, handing him his cup of tea as he sat down with her against the back wall.

"He's sleeping right now, though; he looked peaceful." Inoue-san commented as he sat with Kondou and Toshi.

"Has his condition stabilized, then?" Kawa asked them both, looking at Souji with concern.

Inoue-san answered, "We won't know until he wakes up. He looks the same as last night, but stillâ€¦"

Souji noted the frown on her pretty face and instinctively took her hand, watching her fingers entwine with his own and squeeze even as her hand rested on his knee.

The main door to the room was opened then as Itou-san stood there with a chipper smile on his face. "Good morning!" He greeted.

Everyone near-visibly stiffened at his being there; the swordswoman coughed, mentally cursing the brief tickle in her throat.

"You alright, princess?" Souji muttered, looking at her.

Kawa nodded, sipping her tea. "I'm fine, sorry."

"Don't tell me that strange incident last night has something to do with why everyone looks so pale and ghastly despite the beautiful uptake in weather outside?" Itou-san asked the room at large, looking namely to both vice-commander and commander seated at the head.

Kondou froze slightly, faltering, "Wellâ€¦"

Shinpachi and Sano looked at each other. "Sano, say something!" The former hissed. The latter hissed back indignantly, "M-me? You say something!"

Souji poked his head between them both, "Forget that, let's leave this to the _master_ _of alibis_." He nodded his chin in the direction of Saitou.

Kawa followed his line of sight and smiled slightly; _of course_. Saitou, for as much as she'd known him, despite being the observer instead of the talker, was indeed a skilled wordsmith.

Said man straightened to address the cause of their current issue, "Military Adviser Itou, it's true that there was indeed a strange incident at headquarters last night. While the facts aren't yet fully known, they should be recognized by this evening; I will inform you of them if you'd like." He declared in his calm voice, bowing briefly out of respect.

Raising a brow at the younger man's proposal, Itou-san nodded and looked at the others gathered, "I understand; I'll definitely look forward to hearing about it in detail this evening." He said with a brief smile, turning to leave the meeting room, walking off down the porch.

The occupants gave a simultaneous relieved sigh.

Kawa blew strands of fringe from her brow, "Looks like he let us slide with just thatâ€¦"

Souji chimed, "Methinks he liked how Hajime-kun explained things."

"Let's hope that's the case." Saitou mused.

Toshi reasoned, "All our high-ranked officers were present except San'nan-san; he'll sniff it out soon."

"Got that right; cripes, that man's _such_ a pain in the assâ€¦" Souji sighed, rubbing his neck absently.

"It'd be easier if the space between us and that weasel wasn't so small." Kawa grumbled before sipping her lukewarm tea.

"What should we do, Toshi?" Kondou looked at said man.

Noone said it, but a move was _definitely_ in order.

* * *

><p>"â€| I'm sure things will get rowdy when the Shogun makes his procession through the Capital." Souji mused.<p>

Chizuru blinked in surprise, "Wait, does that mean the Shogun will come to Kyoto?" She asked.

Kawa nodded with a chuckle, "It's the only reason Kondou-san's been giddy recently."

"No kiddin'â€|" Heisuke mused as he walked alongside Souji, lowering his gaze.

His age-mate frowned concernedly at his less-than-cheerful words.

Kawa folded her arms at her chest, perking an ear when hearing a snide laugh from the right side of the street; she glanced back to see two men had cornered a brunette girl in a pink kimono. A dry huff escaped her as she dropped her arms to assess the situation.

"Where's Kawa-chan goingâ€|?" Heisuke wondered at noting the second female had left their company, earning a glance from his fellow captain.

Souji caught her familiar head of black hair coming closer to the entrance to an alley where a brewing scene was gaining strength and he groaned under his breath. "Cripes, babeâ€|" He followed her with Heisuke and Chizuru shortly following, fisting a hand in her haori and bringing her to a halt.

"Soujiâ€|" Kawa began, scowling at his slightly exasperated green eyes.

"I've got this one, 'kay? Just back me up." Souji patted her shoulder gently and shuffled forward, pretending her stare wasn't boring holes into his back.

"N-no, let go!" The girl protested as she tried to get free.

"I almost feel sorry for the foreigners gettin' expelled by asswipes like you two." Souji said nonchalantly, making both men freeze as their stares jerked onto him.

One of the two ronin's gaze sharpened when recognizing the blue coat, "that haoriâ€|"

"Shinsengumi?" The second ronin balked.

Kawa kept her thumb poised to push her katana from the scabbard at her right hip, looking between the apparent-damsel who tried to cower against the side of the building to look at the brunette captain with awe, to the two ronin that looked like they'd pissed themselves stupid at seeing Souji.

She didn't know which was more annoying.

Souji huffed, smirking cockily, "Well we can cut to the chase since

ya were competent enough to figure out that muchâ€| " He made to draw his katana.

"F-forget this!" The second ronin cursed and turned to exit the scene via the nearby alley; now noticing the brunette captain wasn't alone as he saw the swordswoman and second captain standing by, the first ronin bit out, "I'm not gonna forget this!" He vowed weakly, turning tail to hurry after his comrade.

>
That was too easy_â€| Souji scowled slightly at their quick retreat, blinking when the girl fixed her hairpins and shuffled forward to introduce herself; he raised a brow.

"Thank you for helping; I'm Nagumo Kaoru." The girl said sweetly, tilting her head a smidge and offering a polite smile.

Grabbing the sleeve of the second brunette girl, Souji pulled her to stand side-by-side with the Nagumo girl. Nodding slightly even though he earned a confused look from his companion, he smirked. "Well I'll be damned; you two could pass for twins." He mused.

Heisuke quirked both brows and frowned thoughtfully, "How d'you figure? I don't see itâ€| "

"I'm with Heisuke; you need to get your eyes checked, Souji." Kawa agreed coolly, looking at the more dolled-up brunette briefly before sparing a look at her tomboy counterpart and smiling slightly.

Souji rolled his eyes, not missing the slightest rising of her hackles. "Like _you're_ a good judge of bein' a girl, princess." He remarked, smirking cheekily when she shot him a glare.

The Nagumo girl cut in with a slight bow, saying, "I would like to properly thank you, but I'm in the middle of running an errand. Please forgive my brashness." She smiled again before shuffling away down the street, not before pausing to smile a little too warmly at the older captain, "I hope we'll meet again soon, Okita Souji-san of the Shinsengumi." She added, turning back to continue on her way.

Heisuke smirked coyly at his friend, "Ne, I think she's got a soft spot for ya, Soujiâ€| "

"You'll never get laid with that kind of attitude, Heisuke-_bozu_â€| " Souji shook his head.

Kawa scoffed, pretending her brow didn't twitch just the slightest. "***Men**! Chizuru, let's go." She beckoned when the younger girl looked up from inspecting her reflection in a nearby puddle, storming ahead of the group.

Chizuru quickly followed, looking back momentarily at the semi-perplexed looks from both brunette captains, coming to the older girl's side. "Um, Kawa-chan, can I ask you something?" She asked carefully.

"Shoot." Kawa nodded, her tone slightly grouchy.

"Do you think I would look better if I dressed more like a girl?" Chizuru asked, perking her ears.

At noting the curiosity in her doe-eyed stare, the swordswoman exhaled as she looked forward. "You don't need makeup and kimonos to look pretty. Your actions and attitude really stand out more than looks and sweet wordsâ€¦ That's what I think, anyway." She smiled slightly at her roommate, gray eyes calmed.

Of course she wasn't one to talk; she'd refused to dress or act feminine since she was ten, so she was the wrong person to ask in regards to beingâ€¦ well, a girl.

Fighting with swords, hands and feet was what she excelled in, and she was damn-proud of it too.

"Rightâ€¦ You sounded angry with Okita-san, for a minute there." Chizuru admitted, pulling her from her thoughts.

Kawa felt her ears burn and she huffed, resuming the tough-tomboy facet. "I wasn't angry, I was just annoyed because some brothel-bitch batted her eyelashes at him. It's pathetic!" She groused, hands reflexively balling into fists at her sides.

"It was a bit unkind, I'll admit that. But I don't think Okita-san took interest in her, Kawa-chan; he's been loyal to you so farâ€¦ I don't see him having eyes for another woman, really." She reminded, looking at her with truthful brown eyes.

Gauging the honesty written on her face and the reminder her words brought, she quieted and her hands uncurled at her sides. Looking forward, she felt a smile slowly take place on her lips. "Thank you, Chizuruâ€¦ I needed that." She admitted.

Perking up at her grateful response, she smiled as well and nodded. "You're welcome."

:::::1D1:::::

Souji glanced at his station partner. "Not still miffed, are you?" He wondered.

"Not with you." Kawa shrugged, glancing off at the castle they were guarding, resting her right arm on her sword's hilt.

In retrospect, she wasn't angered with him; gods knew she could never bring herself to stay that way with him, namely because he had been the only man to work up the nerve to tell her how he felt, as well as the only man aside from Toshi who put up with her sometimes-reckless moments. The incident during patrols only served to remind her that she wasn't the only woman to see he was handsome.

Of course she highly doubted any woman would care about his mental and emotional well-being as she didâ€¦

She sighed, rubbing her neck. "I should be the one feeling guilty, thinking some brat like that Nagumo girl could catch your eye." She admitted, looking away from him.

"Ya look like Hijikata-san when you frown like that." He mused, perking her ears; he cracked open a green eye to see she looked at him with slightly surprised gray eyes, and he smiled wryly. "If noone's really at fault then don't look so mokey." He chided.

Even though he often teased and flirted with her, he did have a thoughtful side to him that showed itself to her via affectionate gestures or even words if actions couldn't speak loud enough. Sometimes she forgot that he cared about her, inside and out, just as she did for him.

Feeling her cheeks turn rosy, Kawa blew strands of her fringe from her brow, smiling slightly at him in defeat. "Right."

Souji smiled back and started to say something else but for the sudden shift in the calmness of the night air, he looked up, green eyes sharp.

"Souji?" Blinking once, she then yelped slightly as he took off down one path with her in tow by her hand. _What's got him riled up?_ She wondered, skidding to a halt just as his grip tightened on her fingers as he also stopped short of rounding another corner.

He poked his head from around the stone fence to instantly recognize two out of the three intruders; his green stare narrowed. "No wonder I smelled troubleâ€|" He grumbled, releasing her hand to push the blade of his katana out with his left thumb.

She darted a glance around him at the scene and mentally swore, quietly drawing her katana. "On two." She urged, gray meeting green.

>
Oneâ€| __**Two**__!_

* * *

><p>AN**: sorry for the prolonged update. umm yeah some brotp feels between Toshi and Kawa, and then Kawa not hitting it off well with Kaoru (which isn't surprising), and oh look! a cliffhanger! orz don't mind me.. anyway, feel free to review! thanks for the views so far as well~. ch.7 is in the works so stay tuned. _

7. Compatibles

Compatibles

* * *

><p>'This is a problem between us oni.'

Her brow furrowed slightly at recalling the arrogance in his voice; she inwardly huffed. _It's not like anyone who joins the Shinsengumi is allowed to keep their humanityâ€| I'm no exception to that, either. So what did he mean by that?_

Her friend's honest brown eyes flashed in her mind; her gray eyes opened slightly.

>
Chizuru, are you an _oni_ like them?_ She wondered, reflexively digging her heel into the wood of the porch as if rubbing out dirt from under her foot.

>A rushing of feet came from the right of her. Looking up, her gray eyes caught sight of her roommate as she nearly skidded to a halt short of seeing she was present. "Oh, Chizuru." She

greeted.<p>

"Kawa-chan? Don't tell me you're here for a physical examâ€|?" Chizuru asked in confusion, watching the older girl blink once and then twice.

Looking away as she giggled, Kawa shook her head. "Nope, Toshi exempted me from it mostly because I'm a girl. I was just waiting on Souji." She explained, gesturing she come closer as they both poked their heads into the hall full with half-dressed men.

Heisuke rolled his eyes and smirked cheekily while the older brunette was showing off his esteemed muscles to the doctor. "Shinpatsu, if your body's in tip-top shape then that means the doc just hasta check your brain." He said.

Brow twitching, Shinpachi rounded on his friend, "Yer gonna shrink another five inches if ya keep bein' a rude little smart-ass, Heisuke!" He barked.

Sano wanted to slap his forehead as the doctor finished his check-up even as the patient demanded to have a full physical. "Shinpatsu, stop bein' a dumbass and quit holding up the line!"

"Gods don't let that happenâ€|" Kawa grumbled from overhearing the older brunette's pleas for a complete physical, slapping her forehead.

Saitou stepped forward and regarded his friend patiently (even though he completely agreed with Sano), "Physical exams are for medical purposes, not for showing off. Move it." He pointed out, ignoring Souji's cheery smirk at his back when his words seemed to sink into Shinpachi's thick skull.

Chizuru started giggling when Sano and Shinpachi passed one another and then began flexing their muscles, once again reminding the older girl that they were still lunkheads.

Kawa couldn't help but giggle at their antics, shaking her head. "Dummiesâ€|"

"Ne, don't tell me Hijikata-san's lettin' two lovely ladies spy on us." Souji hummed as he approached both girls, a playful smirk on his lips.

Chizuru blushed slightly and looked away, "O-Okita-san!"

Kawa pouted at him, only seeming to make his smirk widen, and she huffed as she poked his chest with a finger. "Clean bill of health?" She wondered, slightly unfazed by his bare chest at this point.

"Yep, tip-top shape, and that's just the majority." He caught her hand on habit and reflexively squeezed, watching her cheeks color a shade of pink that made her look cute.

"Oi, don't go sayin' that in front of virgin earsâ€|" She scolded, pursing her lips.

Souji snickered and released her hand to favor tousling her hair.

"Babe, you're not a virgin." He reminded lightly, feeling rather proud of that fact.

"Pervert!" Kawa grumbled, shooing his hand off and folding her arms at her chest.

"It appears Souji wasn't wrong in saying you resemble Hijikata-san with that frown." Saitou commented as he came forward from having been watching the brunette fluster his lover, blue eyes amused.

"Bite me." Kawa growled, looking away with a scoff, pretending the second captain didn't crack a small smile at her expense.

:::::::::lDl:::::::::

"Um, are you sure this is such a good idea, Kawa-chan?" She wondered for what seemed the fifth time.

It was the day after the entire compound had been charged with 'spring cleaning' the grounds and housing, and seeing as her roommate had finished her chores early "a few hours or so before dinner at least" the older girl had come up with a small sparring match between them.

Refraining from rolling her eyes, her roommate nodded, regarding her hesitance with patient gray eyes. "You did say you attended a dojo when you were younger, didn't you? Sparring should be easy!" At seeing the rising question brightening the younger girl's brown eyes, she sighed exasperatedly. "Look, there's nothing to worry about. Souji's the referee, and I swear that I'm not gonna be too extreme, okay? Just relax." She assured, imagining said man had flashed his trademark smirk at the girl.

Kawa had a sinking feeling she would be explaining the spar at a later time to an inquisitive Oni-Fukuchou but no matter, she accepted whatever consequences would come.

Biting her lower lip slightly, Chizuru was stumped at coming up with another excuse. She knew Kawa was a skilled swordswoman, as skilled as any female warrior she had ever met (which was slim to none), so some small part of her was reluctant to fight her, even if it was just for a spar. Though she supposed with Okita-san being the referee (which was somewhat questionable, given his disposition), it wouldn't be so bad! She just prayed Hijikata-san wouldn't find out; gods knew what he would do.

Looking between both women, Souji raised his right arm up, distinctly feeling the familiar tension the air gained when a fight would happen reappear and fog the atmosphere of the training room! "Begin!" He swung his arm down sharply.

Gripping the handle of her shinai, Chizuru set her brow into a determined scowl and flew forward, the blade aiming to connect with her opponent's right side.

A light 'clack' hummed when Kawa blocked her attack with her own shinai, shoving her off so Chizuru skidded back into the floor yards ahead; rushing her with a slight grunt, Kawa was briefly taken

aback by her opponent's determined expression that had remained glued to her pretty face, her own brow furrowing slightly as she lashed out at where her neck was.

A louder 'clack' ripped into the air just as Chizuru lifted her sword to block, both shinai locked against the other, some measure of surprise scrawled across both combatant's faces.

Surprise fading to be replaced with understanding, Kawa smiled wryly. "Your dojo days weren't wasted." She dug her heels in as she applied more pressure onto her blade, jaw clenching.

Lips forming into a grimace, Chizuru followed suit and forced her opponent's weight off just enough to break out of the hold; she grunted as she lashed out, aiming to hit the torso of her roommate.

Kawa stepped back out of the way as she let her regain her bearings, she panting slightly before she blew strands of her fringe out of sight as she straightened. She gripped the hilt, grunting slightly as she moved forward again, watching her opponent raise her own shinai to bring it down onto her.

Chizuru perked up alertly as her opponent swerved out of the way of her downward strike, wincing slightly when the blade of her roommate's shinai tapped the left side of her neck from behind; she glanced back at her.

Kawa smirked lightly, panting a little. "Saitou-kun was right after all." She mused.

"It woulda been more interesting if you'd been tougher on Chizuru-chan, babe." Souji commented nonchalantly from his position resting against the back wall with his arms folded at his chest as they both bowed slightly out of respect to signify the spar was done, sparing both girls a smirk.

Chizuru puffed her cheeks slightly, glancing away. "It's not like either of us fought poorlyâ€| Right?" She wondered, looking at her roommate.

Kawa smiled wryly again and exhaled, patting her shoulder. "Nah, you did pretty well; don't let the cat ruin your hype." She assured lightly.

"Ha-ha, very funnyâ€|" Souji stuck his tongue out at her.
>Both girls giggled at his annoyed pout.<p>

* * *

><p>"Please tell me you didn't maim herâ€| Damn it, Yasakawa, what the hell were you thinking?"

Paused minutely to let his scolding breach the quiet air of his room, she sipped her tea. "What kind of woman do you take me for, Toshi? It was just for sport, so don't make that face."

Violet glare unwavering, he repeated, "What the hell were you thinking?"

"You can't keep her as a trophy forever. Just because we're supposedly weaker than men doesn't mean we should be damsels." She reminded in a calm voice, gray eyes looking up from above her cup of tea.

Toshi hated when she was did that; he sometimes blamed himself for her scowls and glares that "so said outside sources" resembled his own he wore on a regular basis, but above all he knew she had gained his stonewall-stubbornness from him. Exhaling steadily to try and stay rational, he kept his glare on her. "I doubt she picked up the sword at ten years old. And anyway, trying to train her now of all times is out of the question. You both have chores to do, including accompanying the patrols, and it sounds like you persuaded her to join in the spar." He refrained from allowing the triumph to form a smirk on his face at catching her in the truth.

"If you won't train her, then why not me? You heard what those freaks said that night, what they called her" Toshi, what if it's true?" Kawa demanded quietly, returning the glare albeit a little softer, lowering her cup.

"Who cares what they said? You're not training her, Yasakawa. That's an order!" He snapped firmly when she started to argue, watching her gray eyes widen slightly.

Gaze sombering as she lowered it to the side, her shoulders slumped with a soft sigh. "Sir." She took a generous sip and then looked up at him. "If it's true, are you afraid of what could happen?" She knew he loved her as if she were his own blood, that he would protect her when she couldn't. Was he afraid she would get hurt? She was a grown woman, for the gods' sakes, she was used to pain by this point in her life. But still, she couldn't help but ask.

Violet eyes tightening slightly at the knot that formed in his stomach when thinking about what could happen to her if she went too far, if she triggered something. Toshi refolded his arms in the sleeves of his yukata. "Just that I couldn't do something about it. You're not related by blood, but even so, I'll be damned if I let anything happen to my kid sister. I put you through hell once, and I don't wish to do it again." He stated evenly.

Kawa's gaze softened and sombered at the same time, and she closed her eyes with an exhale. "Y'know, you can be a big softie when you take off that oni mask." She mused with a slight laugh, sipping her tea contently.

His left brow gave a twitch; way to ruin the moment, dummy, he silently groused, outwardly scoffing as he shut his eyes and pretended his cheeks didn't feel warm. "I almost forgot how annoying you were" It's a wonder Chizuru puts up with sharing a room with you." He said flatly.

"Oh, so you're on a first-name basis? Wow, I didn't think you moved that fast, onii-chan~." She teased as she downed the last of her tea, gray eyes impish when they met his slightly widened violet.

His cheeks colored a dark pink as he gave a dagger-filled glare that she ignored, snorting. "Shouldn't you go get some sleep?" He growled, watching her stand.

"Sheesh, you're as grouchy as ever! You obviously haven't done anything unmentionable otherwise you'd be more chipper!" Kawa complained, shuffling to the door leading to the porch.

"**Go to bed, Yasakawa**!" Toshi ordered angrily, face a shade of red as she laughed and stepped out into the night, closing the door in her wake. He sighed wearily when she left, running a hand through his hair. "Damn it allâ€¦ she really is a brat sister."

* * *

><p>AN**: sorry for the wait! been busy with tumblr and dealing w/ life.. how'd everyone's Thanksgiving go? stuffed like turkeys? lol yeah same here.. anyway! going to update my other Hakuouki fic, _The Words of a She-Wolf_, in a second, and then i'm hitting the hay. later!

8. Rose-thorns

Rose-thorns

* * *

><p>"He only ordered me to do this because he was too lazy to do it himselfâ€¦" She grumbled as she walked down the porch to awaken a certain brunette with a pout on her face.<p>

Once reaching his door, she sighed slightly. "Souji, breakfast!" She declared.

He didn't respond, earning a slight twitch on her brow; _oh, being lazy, was he? That overgrown cat_â€¦

Kawa opened the door to see him still sleeping soundly with his back facing the door; she pursed her lips and exhaled, shuffling inside. "Souji, get up. You're gonna let Shinpatsu eat your meal?" She reminded as she nudged his back with her toe, hands on her hips.

"Cats _need_ their sleep, _baaaabe_â€¦" The lanky brunette mumbled in his sleep, perking her ears.

"You're gonna be a _drowned_ cat if you keep laying around, dummy." She huffed, blinking when he yawned and only snuggled more into his sheets.

>You lazy purring dumbassâ€¦ Kawa shook her head and doubled to pinch his nose between two fingers.

"Owâ€¦!" Green eyes popping open, Souji pulled her hand off, taking a brief glance over his shoulder to see she scowled patiently at him, before an idea came to mind; he tugged on her wrist lightly to pull her down, making her yelp in surprise.

"S-Souji!" Kawa started to protest when his mouth was at her neck and he started kissing and nipping the skin, making her squeak involuntarily and then squirm against him, trying to push away, but for his tightened grip on her ribs, she couldn't prevail.

Souji sighed happily when she gave up reluctantly, smirking widely

and triumphantly at his flush-faced lover. "Good mornin', princess." He hummed.

Kawa panted slightly and frowned sorely at his underhanded tactics, once again finding it hard to stay miffed with him. "I hate it when you do that!" She complained.

Souji snickered as his arms reflexively squeezed her middle. "Ya still love me for it," he reminded jovially.

Pouting in reluctant defeat at his stumping her, she exhaled and smiled a little, lifting a hand to brush some of his bangs back, kissing the tip of his nose. She giggled quietly at his scrunched face, gingerly detangling out of his grip. "C'mon, I came to drag ya to breakfast." She said, brushing her hair back and trying to straighten it out as she sat up at his bedside.

He returned the pout, slightly miffed the would-be moment was ruined, and nodding. "You owe me for that." He waggled, leaning in to kiss her lips warmly, briefly.

Smiling contently when he drew back, she winked. "Deal."

* * *

><p>Kawa pouted slightly, exhaling.<p>

"Problem, princess?" Souji nudged her, tilting his head slightly.

It didn't take a genius to see she wasn't appeased. He knew she didn't like coming to Shimabara mostly because she often commented with '_we've got plenty booze at home_'. So when she had heard wind they "the baka trio, Saitou, Toshi, the two of them" were going out to celebrate Sano's bonus for guarding some bulletin board, he knew she wasn't too keen on going (even though they brought Chizuru along).

Although she was cute when she got annoyed, he had to admit he couldn't disagree this time around!

"No, I'm alright." Kawa sighed, sipping her _sake_. She popped a piece of fish into her mouth and chewed, rolling her eyes as both Heisuke and Shinpachi chugged the booze like thirsty men with water.

"I've heard that the esteemed Hijikata-han was as fearsome as an _oni_, but you're as handsome as an actor." The geiko who waited on their party, Kimigiku, commented as she sat on the left side of the swordswoman's brother, earning a glance from said girl.

Sipping the strong drink in hand, Toshi remarked coolly, or as coolly as one _could_ sound while buzzed, "I hear that a lot."

Souji snorted amusedly as Kawa giggled and Shinpachi and Heisuke simultaneously spat out their drinks and guffawed at the buzzed _oni_.

Shinpachi piped up after what seemed another fifteen minutes later, "Still surprised we got so much money just guarding that stupid billboard. Seems a bit much, y'know? I mean, can you imagine how much

we woulda gotten if you'd managed to catch the dumbasses." He looked at his fellow captain curiously, "Why'd you hold back anyway, Sano? You're capable of at least taking down eight guys with no sweat." He asked.

Heisuke agreed, "Yeah, I thought that was strange too; y'veen managed to catch a few of themâ€¦| What's up, Sano-san?"

Instead of answering either of them, Sano looked at the younger girl in their party. "You didn't go anywhere that night, did you, Chizuru?" He asked.

Blinking once in surprise, Chizuru frowned slightly and answered, "No."

"What's that for, Sano?" Kawa asked in slight confusion, her brow also folded into a frown.

Frowning a little, Sano lamented, "While we were apprehending those Tosa Clansmen, a girl that looked a lot like Chizuru got in our way and helped them, therein screwing things up for our squad."

"That's horrible," Chizuru said quietly in empathy.
>
A girl that looked a lot like Chizuru_â€¦| Kawa clicked her tongue. "Tch, you _still_ don't believe me about that brat?" She wondered dryly, her eyes on Souji.

"Don't be sore about it," Souji chided calmly, pretending she didn't huff, looking at the girl in question. "It might've been the girl y'met while on patrol with Heisuke, remember? Nagumo Kaoru; she ****did**** look a helluva lot like you." He reminded.

Faltering slightly, she dropped her brown stare to her dirty tray of food. "Yeah, but that's not enough to prove anythingâ€¦|"

"I didn't think she looked like ya, and Kawa-chan agreed too! She was dressed up like a girl, after all." Heisuke chimed in her defense, earning a nod from the woman.

Saitou then spoke up from his seat on Souji's right, "then why don't we dress her up in a kimono to prove that?" He proposed.

One second passed in silenceâ€¦| and then anotherâ€¦|

"Dress Chizuru up!" Heisuke exclaimed as he hopped to his feet, a bright sparkle in his teal eyes.

Shinpachi also hopped up, "That's a great idea! Oi, sorry Kimigiku-san, but couldja put her in a kimono?" He asked the geiko hopefully.

****_EH_**_!?!_**" Chizuru squeaked in horror.

Kawa slapped her forehead. "Cripes, you two are impossible!" She declared.

"Maybe we should put the She-Wolf in a kimono tooâ€¦|" Sano hummed.

"Over my dead body!" Souji scoffed before his lover could counter,

arms firmly folded at his chest.

Toshi couldn't agree more, "You lotâ€|" He began to berate them when he was halted by a gentle hand from the geiko.

"It would be no trouble whatsoever on my part," Kimigiku obliged them with a sweet smile, not minding the _oni's_ reddened cheeks at having agreed with the baka trio.

:::::lDl:::::

"Surprised you left early." He commented as he found her leaned over the porch railing looking at the quaint pond in the closed-in courtyard below their floor, smirking gently as he sidled to her side. "Kinda reminiscent." He added, earning a brief look from her.

Smiling softly at recalling just what he was talking about, she nodded and looked down at the moon's reflection on the pond surface. "To this day, I still can't help but wonder if you performed so well during the tournament just to show off to me." She mused.

"I thought I was the one with the ego, princessâ€|" He remarked, poking her cheek with a finger.

She blushed humbly and chuckled, shrugging. "Were you?" She asked, meeting his green stare.

A pout formed on his lips as he looked down at the pond as well, exhaling. "Not like I had to try hard, I knew ya liked me as much as I did youâ€|" He mused, shrugging as well.

Pursing her lips, Kawa sighed and reflexively cuffed him, giggling softly at his 'ow', and leaning against his shoulder. "You're still an idiotâ€|" But you're my idiot." She said softly.

Souji perked an ear at hearing her possessive pronoun, and his eyes softened slightly; he used his free hand to tuck some of her tousled locks back behind her left ear. "Yer as forceful as ever, princess." He teased gently, making her blush slightly as a shy smile crossed her pretty face.

* * *

><p>AN**: aand yes more SoujiKawa fluff just bc i love this OTP, they're so cute. seeing as this chapter was otherwise a filler, next chapter willALSO be a filler. see i said i was gonna post the OVA(s) on this story and i meant it. yes i covered the _Sekkaroku_ mini-season so you know what that means~ lD

shoutout to **hineko** for reviewing both of my currently running Hakuouki fics and best of luck on writing your own, **hineko**!
ganbatte! ;D

9. Snowflakes

**Snowflakes**

* * *

><p>The door to the room slid open as quietly as possible.<p>

Noting the sleeping form on the futon covered with the thick blankets, the swordsman smiled privately at his roommate, closing the door just as quietly as he'd opened it, tiptoeing to put away his robe he'd cleaned prior to retiring after the otherwise-uneventful evening patrol.

"You're not a very sneaky kitty tonight." The supposedly-asleep form commented just as he was putting his swords on their nearby stand.

Shoulders slumping, the samurai closed his green eyes momentarily before looking in the direction of the futon. "Get some sleep, don't mind me." He urged calmly.

The form shifted before a head of black hair lifted. "Y'know when you're doing night shifts I don't sleep much." She reminded patiently, sitting up as he was shrugging out of his normal clothes into his sleeping robe.

>
Of course not, ya worry too much_â€| Okita Souji sighed and tightened the sash of his robe at his waist, turning to catch the knowing expression that adorned her pretty face. He felt a smile hedge at his lips when noting her slightly-messy head of black hair, shuffling to join her. "Well we came back safely, so y'can sleep easy now." He assured with a roll of his eyes, stealing a kiss before settling down at her side.

Hijikata Yasakawa shook her head with a patient smile, shuffling to curl up in his arms, resting her cheek on his shoulder. "Lunkheadâ€|" She murmured.

The brunette chuckled and ran his fingers through her hair lazily, kissing her forehead. "Ya don't act like y'worry, even though ya clearly do." He said knowingly.

Heat colored her cheeks pink as she snuggled closer to his body. "Loving you has its side-effects, Souji." She defended quietly.

Souji smiled fondly at her remark, tugging the blankets back to cover them both. "Did I mention that ya were adorable when yer defensive?" He teased.

"Honestlyâ€|" Kawa groused, pouting up at him, but for the amused twinkle in his otherwise-fond green stare, she sighed and kissed him warmly, smiling when his arm around her waist tightened as he reciprocated eagerly, his lips moving against hers as he sought dominance over her.

>
'Don't mind me' he saysâ€| Right. Like it's that easy._

::::::::lDl::::::::

"Thank you, come again!"

Waving absently at the man who'd sold her the ink-sticks, the swordswoman stepped out into the chilly street of Kyoto. She loved this season, mostly because it gave her reason to enjoy hot tea and

appreciate the things she didn't during the other three seasonsâ€|

But running errands for a certain _oni_ wasn't one of the things she enjoyed.

>
Cripes, why can't he get his __**own**__ damn ink-sticks?_ She wondered, puffing her cheeks out a smidge as she thought back to his request, letting the air out of her cheeks in an exhale, watching her breath become a soft small cloud of fog.

Tucking her purchase into the sleeves of her navy _haori_ she'd worn, Kawa looked up as she was coming closer to the sword shop when catching sight of a familiar sky blue. She raised a brow when recognizing the head of raven-black talking to another familiar head of brown donning pink; she smiled slowly at her two friends, quickening her pace a little.

"Saitou-kun~," she sang lightly as she drew up to the captain's side, earning a slightly-surprised look from his companion.

"Oh, Kawa-chan! What're you doing here?" The brunette girl asked in slight confusion and what she could only assume was politeness.

"The _oni_ sent me on an errand in this blasted cold when he's got his own legs to do it himselfâ€|" The swordswoman answered with a pout, making the girl chuckle.

The captain sweatdropped, trudging ahead of the two women. "And pestering me while I'm on patrol is _part_ of the request?" He asked blandly, slightly miffed at the moment she had unintentionally ruined.

She kept pace with him easily, rolling her eyes. "Nope, I just came to say '_hello_', but you were too busy making goo-goo eyes at the swords." She answered jovially, earning a look from her fellow lefty.

"I was not '_making goo-goo eyes'_, I was explaining their hidden meaning to Yukimura when you interrupted." Saitou Hajime answered, swearing his left brow twitched.

Kawa spared a mild glance at the girl in question as she was speaking with one of the men in his squad, and she cracked a slow grin; she elbowed her friend. "You _like_ her." She teased softly.

Saitou stiffened at her assumption, blue eyes jerking onto her smug gray eyes and her mischievous smile he knew she had learned to make from a certain brunetteâ€| He looked away curtly, pretending the heat burning his ears didn't descend slowly to color his pale cheeks. "You're being ridiculous." He didn't deny that he respected Yukimura, admired her bravery for having stuck with their group for as long as she had, but to say he liked her in a _romantic_ senseâ€| He inwardly shook his head.

He had a sinking feeling that if Kawa's assumption was correct, then he'd never hear the end of it.

The swordswoman snickered. "Then why're you _blushing?_" She hummed, the last word she uttered only serving to darken the pink color on his handsome face.

Saitou closed his eyes, exhaling steadily. "I am doing no such thingâ€¦ And anyway, I thought you had to give Hijikata-san whatever it was he sent you out to get." He said with a finality edging on his quiet voice that not only stated the topic was done with but that he was getting annoyed with her badgering.

"Ya act just like him sometimes, Saitou-kunâ€¦" Kawa pouted, shaking her head at his stonewall denial regarding her assumption, and looking forward as they were passing another street she knew she was going to have to take to get back to the temple. "Pray you don't let Souji see thatâ€¦ Gods know he'd be worse about it than me." She looked at her friend and winked, turning to take her intended street. "Chizuru-chan, see ya back at home!" She added over her shoulder to the younger girl, seeing her wave lightly to which she smiled brightly, before leaving the group be.

>
Okay so I just teased him, but still, he was pretty adamant about it not being true_â€¦ Kawa sighed. "Men are such an enigma." She mused.

* * *

><p>"I still don't see why Toshi didn't let me go!" Kawa grumbled from standing near the brunette, arms folded behind her head.<p>

Souji rolled his eyes and nudged her ribs, "Ain't it obvious? He obviously didn't want ya to be caught up in this incase somethin' were to go wrong." He reminded, noting her slightly downcast expression and smiling wryly as he added, "'Sides the fact that he knows I'd kill him if anything happened to you."

Looking up at him in slight surprise, her cheeks warmed and she looked away with a humble smile. "You both worry too much." She chided softly, closing her eyes for a moment before looking at the gateway of their headquarters.

"â€¦I'd think of her as more like a little sister, ta be honest." Sano's voice stirred them from their conversation.

Smirking slightly at their conversation, Souji decided to put his comment in, "Ne to me, it's more like watchin' a warrior go off to battle." Tapping his chin with a somber frown on his handsome face, he sighed, "Poor Chizuru-chan; we prolly won't ever see her againâ€¦" He lamented.

Heisuke twisted about to scowl at him, "Don't jinx her like that, Souji!"

Kawa rolled her eyes, "Just because ya've got the hots for Chizuru-chan don't mean ya can order your seniors around, Heisuke." She remarked coolly, smiling cheekily when he shot a flustered scowl at her with blush on his face, folding her arms at her chest instead and sighing, turning about to retreat to the inner recesses of the temple. "Souji, c'mon, I'll make some tea." She beckoned lightly.

Souji smiled after her leave and trodded in her wake, missing the whipping gesture made by Shinpachi.

Heisuke laughed at the implication.

:::::lDl:::::

"Come on, you guys! Not you too, Saitou-san!" Chizuru urged embarrassedly, blushing a shade of pink.

Kawa shook her head as Shinpachi, Souji and Saitou shared a laugh, nudging the younger girl. "I'm sure you were just as pretty as you were last summer, Chizuru-chan. Y'know how the boys are!" She assured.

"Ne, Kawa-chan, who're ya callin' _'boys'?_" Shinpachi demanded with feigned hurt at her comment.

"_You_, obviously, you and Souji are like two overgrown kids!" Kawa answered with a cheeky smile, giggling when both men pouted at her, earning a giggle from Chizuru as well.

Saitou smiled slightly at their antics, looking at Shinpachi, "still, I can't believe Yamazaki pulled that stunt." He mused.

Chizuru giggled again at the reminder.

Souji tilted his head slightly, "What'd he do, Hajime-kun?" He asked.

Shinpachi snickered, "Oh yeah, that!" He lifted the small piece of paper from his plate with his chopsticks, earning a confused look from the younger brunette, before eating it.

Kawa rolled her eyes, chuckling. "Kinda wish I'd have been there." She admitted, sharing a look with Chizuru and smiling.

Souji pouted sorely at his lover, "Not you too, Kawa!" He sighed and scowled at his finished plate, cheeks slightly puffed out. "Fine, I'll ask 'im about it when I see him." He muttered. Or just get the information from her at a more appropriate time.

"Both of ya fine ladies, eat up!" Shinpachi declared lightly, stirring him from his thoughts.

Smiling brightly, Souji chimed, "Yep, don't be shy; this's on _Shinpatsu's_ tab after all!"

"E-eh, it is? Oh right!" Said man balked slightly, quickly looking into his coin-bag and seeming to gawk because he then looked at the third captain present. "Um, Saitou?"

Blinking at his distressed expression, Saitou smiled sheepishly. "I'll get it, then."

Shinpachi grinned cheesily, "Thanks, Saitou." He'd have to owe the man big next time they went out. "I guess we're gonna be stuck at Shimabara for the next few weeks; Itou-san invited us to celebrate the new year with 'im, didn't he?" He asked to change subject from his unexpected shortcoming.

Kawa sipped her drink. "I thought _weasels_ hibernated during winter!" She mused aloud.

Souji snorted amusedly; "Kawa-chan, I'm sure Itou-san has his reasons, doesn't he Nagakura-san?" Chizuru reproached her friend, earning a pout from the woman, looking at the older captain.

"Hang on, he didn't mention it to _me_." Souji declared, frowning at the notion in feigned hurt.

Shinpachi chuckled, "that's only 'cuz he knows ya'd kill him without hesitation!" He teased.

Souji pondered momentarily before smirking brightly at his accusation, "Pft, yer damn right I would."

Kawa spared him a knowing smirk before sipping her _sake_. _Like he'd be the __**only **__**one**__ willing to cut down that weasel_, she thought.

The rest of their meal went by with idle chatter, and she for a moment felt that the night would end on a calm note.

Of course she happened to be wrong about things sometimesâ€¦|

Saitou exhaled in mild exasperation at the brewing scene between Shinpachi and a trio of drunken ronin.

Kawa rolled her eyes at the scene, wincing slightly when the main ronin Shinpachi had 'insulted' decked him right in the gut. "Sheesh, Shinpatsuâ€¦|"

"Souji, go ahead and take the girls back. I'll stay with Shinpachi." Saitou urged calmly, nodding to the brunette.

"Alrighty; c'mon, girls." Souji nodded and started off back home, Kawa following to sidle to his side with Chizuru bringing up the rear.

"Um, are you two sure Nagakura-san will be alright?" Chizuru asked once they left the amber glow of the streets, looking from one to the other.

Souji shrugged, "its best Hajime-kun stick around to drag him back; the situation woulda been worse if Sano-san and Heisuke were there." He answered calmly.

Kawa chuckled, "Souji's right, if those three were together back there, it'd be a full-on show." She agreed, looping her right arm with his left.

Chizuru frowned slightly at their nonchalance, giving up reluctantly and only following the couple.

"Ne, you cold, princess?" Souji wondered, looking at his lover with a tilt of his head.

Giggling softly at his head-tilt, Kawa shook her head. "Not really."

Souji smiled fondly at getting her to laugh, squeezing her arm reflexively; he perked up and looked to see soft fuzzy flakes slowly

falling before and around them, noting Kawa stopped walking to admire the snowfall.

"The first snowfall!" Chizuru said behind them in awe, smiling at the sight, reminiscent of a happy child.

Kawa smiled as well and extended her left hand out to catch one particular snowflake on her outstretched palm, drawing her arm back and noting the flake had melted in her hand's grasp; she frowned slightly at the melted ice, exhaling.

"If it keeps snowing like this, covering everything with white, it'd be something wouldn't it? Like if the world was reborn." Souji mused aloud near her, perking her ears.

Chizuru looked at him in slight awe at the reality his words brought, looking up at the snowfall again.

Kawa's face softened and she smiled, tugging on his sleeve. "C'mon, I'll race you." She challenged, a surge of energy reaching her bones as she mulled over what he said, gray eyes bright.

Blinking once at her challenge, Souji's green eyes softened and he hummed, grinning playfully at her. "You're on!"

"H-hey, Okita-san, Kawa-chan!" Chizuru barked just as both lovers took off at a sprint; she groaned and then hurried after them at top speed.

* * *

><p>"Well that ain't fair, lettin' you three eat everything!" Souji sang lightly as he, Sano and Kawa poked their heads into his room.

Kondou blinked and then smiled at his prodigy, "Oh, Souji; it figures you'd find out, given you've got a sharp nose. When you were little, I remember you'd always wait to see if I brought you anything." He said as the couple shuffled to sit in the circle.

Sano chuckled, "Oi Souji, you sure _yer_ not the one spyin' on people?" He asked coyly.

"Ne, Sano-san, ya know that's a secret." Souji chided with a laugh, earning an unamused pout from the older captain.

Kawa rolled her eyes at them and giggled, taking two dango sticks and handing one to him. "_That_ wouldn't surprise me, knowing you can sometimes be a sneaky cat." She teased.

Toshi scoffed and smirked amusedly when Souji pouted at her, arms folded in his sleeves just as Heisuke, Shinpachi and Saitou converged on their would-be small gathering. "I wasn't aware we had cats in the compound!" He mused.

"Stow it, wouldja?" Souji huffed and munched on a ball of the dango, brow twitching as he narrowed his eyes annoyedly at the _oni's_ smug gaze.

"O-ow, Sano!" Heisuke yelped when he got clocked by a reproachful

captain, rubbing his head gingerly.

"Dumbass, quit hovering over the dango and just grab ****one**!**" Sano scolded.

"I wasn't hovering, I was tryin' to protect them from Shinpatsu's bottomless pit!" Heisuke barked, earning an amused snicker from said man.

Shinpachi munched on a dango ball, smirking at the flustered boy, "Men don't make excuses for themselves, right Sano?" He hummed.

Kawa rolled her eyes again. "I think Heisuke's got a point about you three being 'bottomless pits'â€|" She deadpanned.

"Since when're ya complainin'?" Sano jibed.

"Since now!" Kawa huffed, smiling cheekily.

Toshi shook his head at their antics, valiantly fighting a smile with a well-practiced scowl, exhaling. "Geez, you guys are unbelievableâ€|" He reached for his desktop to put away his haiku book, but a different hand snatched the book before he could touch it.

Souji gauged the older man's gaping expression with a mischievous light in his green stare, flipping the pages open to read one particular poem aloud, clearing his throat. "'Together watching the morning snow, amused, while still wearing a nightgown'â€|" He looked at him with the mischief in his eyes transferred to a grin as he held up a dango, "Well how's this for '_amused'?" He hummed.

"Soujiâ€| Give it back!" Toshi barked as he jumped up to snatch the book back, only to miss as the younger man danced out of the way, his ears burning when everyone started laughing, swiping angrily at his friend. "Are you seriously mocking me!?" He demanded.

"Nope, _yer_ just slow!" Souji laughed as he kept dodging.

"Souji, toss it!" Kawa giggled, hopping up and gesturing for the book, catching it expertly and narrowly swerving out of the angered _oni_'s reach. "Too slow, _onii-chan~!_" She teased.

"Yasakawa, give it back, dammit!" Toshi ordered, growling as she booked it onto the porch; he bolted after her at top speed while swearing colorfully, not minding the laughs and curious looks from their friends as he chased her.

Kawa darted around another corner and another, skidding to a halt as she neared the well; just as she was about to hop off the porch, a pair of arms grabbed her around the ribs, making her yelp.

Both of them fell onto the ground and she scrambled to get free, kneeling him sharply in the gut to try and get loose, but his grip was tight.

Panting, Toshi held her right arm behind her back, making her yelp again. He barked a laugh and gasped out, "Hand it over!"

Pouting slightly at being subdued by him, Kawa exhaled and forfeited

the book back to its owner, feeling him release her arm so she could move away as he sat back on the ground and she panted as she sat on her knees. "You're not fair!" She complained once she could regain her breath, scowling sorely at him.

He smirked triumphantly at her demise, putting the book into the folds of his yukata. "Don't be a brat about it. 'Sides, you shouldn't have gotten it from Souji." He huffed.

Kawa puffed her cheeks out and sighed. "Shut up, it's not like we didn't do this before. Remember back at Shieikan, when Souji and I stole your med box?" She replied, giggling at the memory.

"Ugh, how could I forget? I chased you two at least twice around the dojo!" Toshi groaned, making her laugh; his scowl faded slowly at her expression and he smiled slightly, straightening to his feet and offering a hand. "C'mon, you probably made Souji worry that I'd gone and chased you out of Kyoto." He joked.

Kawa smiled amusedly and took his hand, helping herself up as they both retreated to the porch. "Prolly!" She chuckled.

* * *

><p>AN**: so yeah i jumbled up a few pieces of each ep and combined them into this lovely chapter filled with fluff, comedy, and just the sheer zannyness that goes on in the Shinsengumi compound. in short, **I REGRET NOTHING**.

now plz excuse your humble author as she goes to get some well-needed sleep.. 'night all, stay beautiful! ^^

10. Divinations

Divinations

* * *

><p>The sound of weight being put onto the wooden porch just outside their room caught her sensitive ears.<p>

Gray eyes opening sharply, the swordswoman sat up, glancing at her roommate "who'd also awoken at the soft noise" to the shoji doors leading to the porch; her jaw tensed just as a silhouette of a man came into view on the opposite end of the flimsy panel, the footsteps stopping short of their door.

She knew men had urges, but surely none of their soldiers would sink so low! She had a hand on the hilt of her katana (once propped up against the wall and now in her possession), slender fingers gripping the leather tightly, ready to draw and defend both herself and the younger girl who'd called quietly to the silhouette.

Door sliding open, the man stepped into their room.

"_Hell!_" The older girl growled at recognizing the man's striking white hair and gleaming red eyes that locked on them both, namely on the brunette girl.

"Blood! I want blood!" The Rasetsu grinned with bloodlust screaming in his red eyes as he drew his katana.

Kawa launched herself at the monster, katana clashing viciously with his own as she forced him away, her own teeth bared even as the beast snarled and flashed his fangs. "Chizuru, get out of here; ****NOW****!" She ordered, grimacing when the blood-sucker plunged a foot into her belly and sent her flying back.

"Kawa-chan!" She exclaimed, gasping when the beast resumed his sights onto her, scrambling away to put distance between them.

****SOUJI****! ****TOSHI****!" Kawa yelled, hearing a yelp come from the girl as she heard cloth rip. "Chizuru!" She barked, perking up as a streak of purple barreled into their room and slashed at the beast, blood flying. "Toshi!" She declared in relief.

"Both of you, get out of here!" Toshi ordered, looking at the brunette namely as his 'sister' scrambled out into the protective grip of her lover who'd tailed the older man to the scene.

Chizuru yelped in fear when the supposedly slain beast latched onto her ankle with a hand, watching the injury on his back regenerate, just before Sano's spear stabbed into his wrist. "H-Harada-san!" She declared, hurriedly scrambling behind Toshi's back when the captain pulled his spear out.

Sano perked up as the monster straightened to look at the group who'd surrounded the scene, sights falling on the brunette girl again.

"Blood! blood!" The Rasetsu growled.

"Dammit, he's stubborn," Kawa cursed from behind Souji's barricade, gray eyes narrowing before Toshi cut him down, and with Sano's spear ramming into the heart, the monster was felled and crashed onto the right door panel.

"Why'd he come all the way here?" Heisuke wondered of the group at large.

San'nan-san spoke up as he came onto the scene, "I must apologize, I didn't keep a close-enough eye on him." He apologized to the group.

"San'nan-kun, just what happened?" Kondou asked him.

"I'm not sure, myself!" San'nan-san shook his head, looking at Chizuru and then at Kawa, "are you both alright, girls?" He asked.

"Just a few scratches." Kawa replied as she looked at Chizuru, both of them sharing a nod. "Thanks anyway, San'nan-san!"

"_What the hell's all the commotion for!?"

Kawa winced slightly at the shrill exclamation that came barreling down the porch towards them, taking the form of Itou-san. Crap, this was ****so**** not good!

"Can someone please explainâ€¦ E-ehh! S-S-San'nan-san!? W-wait, y-you should be d-dead! H-howâ€¦?" Itou-san stammered out, backing away slowly.

Kondou took charge quickly, placing a reassuring hand on the man's shoulder and turning him in the direction he'd come, "That's enough questions for now, Itou-san; it's late so I'll explain things tomorrow. Try to calm downâ€¦"

"_H-how can I be calm!? You'd better have a damn-good explanation for this, Kondou-san!_" Itou-san cried, his voice carrying as both men left the scene.

Souji huffed, rolling his eyes. "Oi, since he found out, can we kill him now?" He asked their vice-commander hopefully.

"I second that." Kawa grumbled, deadpanning.

Toshi shot the couple a look, exhaling. "I imagine tomorrow will be a slice of hellâ€¦"

"If ya don't mind, I'll gladly offer my room to the She-Wolf," Souji offered jovially, earning a scowl from the older Hijikata.

"'_Gladly_' is an understatementâ€¦ But fine. Chizuru will have my room, then." Toshi nodded, looking at the younger woman.

Blushing slightly, said brunette nodded and shuffled away from the scene.

Kawa raised both brows, throwing her 'brother' a smooth grin. "Ne, just put up a '_do not disturb_' sign, why don't you?" She teased.

"Shut up." Toshi growled, blushing slightly, before he coughed and turned to follow her roommate.

"O-oi, what was _that_ supposed to mean, Kawa-chan?" Heisuke asked, looking at the older girl in confusion.

Souji snickered and then sighed, "C'mon, princess." He ushered her down the porch to his room with a slight bounce in his step and Kawa at his side.

Saitou shook his head, "It's best you _don't_ ask, Heisuke." He answered his age-mate blandly.

:::::lDl:::::

The boys were all but livid when hearing that not only was Itou-san leaving the Shinsengumi to be the tomb-guard for the late Emperor, but also that he was taking Heisuke and Saitou with his faction.

Sighing, Kawa decided to steer clear of Shinpachi and Sano for the time being; the former more than the latter, but she digressed.

Whatever reason Saitou and Heisuke were leaving was their business;

even though she felt some measure of bitterness at their parting, she couldn't do much of anything to stop them, nor could she demand Toshi that they stay.

"I'm sure the cherry blossoms are gonna miss your observations." Kawa mused aloud as she found her fellow lefty, seeing him perk up slightly and look in her direction; she smiled wanly.

Turning a little towards her, Saitou raised a brow. "I thought you all were angered with my leaving." He knew Souji wasn't too pleased about the ordeal, although he wasn't as boisterous about it as Shinpachi had been, but his disapproval was still present.

He highly doubted Kawa approved either; she couldn't stand Itou-san, much less that he had separated their numbers.

"It's not like I'm giving you my blessing; not that you need it." Kawa remarked, pulling him from his thoughts, as she approached him and, now that he noticed, she had a parcel kept in a blue and white handkerchief on hand. "Here." She offered the object to him.

Blinking once, Saitou took it from her and then met her gray stare. "What is it?"

"Some onigiri for you, and there's some for Heisuke too. I imagine the trip to guard the Emperor's mausoleum won't be easy." Kawa explained, shrugging and offering a slight smile. "Your life is yours to do what you will, and as a friend, I won't stand in the way of whatever choice you make." She finished.

Soaking in her words, Saitou cracked a small smile, somewhat surprised she had gone to the trouble of making food for him and Heisuke, two men turning their backs on their family (as she'd once called it, in a different time), but moreover relieved she hadn't shared in Shinpachi and Souji's disapproval for his decision. He nodded and bowed slightly. "Some days your kindness surprises even me. Thank you, for respecting my decision." He replied.

Kawa smiled lightly and crossed her arms at her chest. "Just because I'm older than you doesn't mean I'm your mother, or your big sister." She wouldn't deny she did feel like a big sister to Heisuke, but felt like she was a little less than Saitou's equal; she had no right to dictate what he did or how he lived.

"You surely don't act older, half the time!" Saitou rolled his eyes, making her blush a little, indignantly.

"Y'know, I miss you already!" Kawa stuck her tongue out, her stare catty at catching the amusement in his blue eyes. Exhaling, she turned to retreat into the inner recesses of the temple, pausing to smile thoughtfully at her friend. "Don't get killed out there, or I'm gonna do the job for you." She threatened with the smile shifted to a knowing smirk, before resuming her trek inside.

* * *

><p>She could swear she was gonna give that oni princess a piece of her mind the next time she saw her; why'd she have to jinx thingsâ€|?

Souji scoffed as he danced out of the way of a rebutting fist from Amagiri, gripping the katana reflexively. "So much for prayin' we wouldn't run into you freaks again." He mused bitingly.

"I might develop an allergy to oni at this rate!" Kawa agreed as she lashed out sharply at the redhead, grimacing as she narrowly dodged a would-be well placed kick from her opponent, panting a little.

Toshi couldn't agree more, perking up when catching sign of movement in the fog from the recesses of the temple; he fell back just as Sano spoke the younger girl's name in surprise, violet eyes sharpening as he focused his sights on a familiar head of blonde carrying said girl on his shoulder. He swore under his breath.

"Let her go!" Kawa ordered angrily, perking up as the blonde set his 'prize' down to assess the scene; her lip curled as she gripped the hilt of her katana.

Gauging the clustered glares from the Shinsengumi dogs, Kazama set his sights on the older Hijikata and smirked coolly. "You don't intend to try and take her back, do you?" He drawled.

Cracking a dangerous smirk in response, Toshi scoffed. "I'm starting to get sick of you bastards, especially because you trespassed on Shinsengumi grounds!" He rushed him, metal clashing with metal screeching shrilly in the night as they went toe-to-toe against the other.

"Well since my dearest brother isn't holding backâ€¦!" Kawa muttered, lunging swiftly at Amagiri and making to cut his chest before he struck out, feinting to hit his ribs and missing as he caught her blade in time, slightly surprising her.

"You wolves don't learn, do you?" Amagiri wondered, roughly tossing her aside so she hit the ground.

Souji crashed into his right side, dancing out of the way of his attempt to hit his torso; his green eyes narrowed angrily as he raised his katana's blade a smidge. "Not when you screw with our pack." He hummed, lunging with renewed vigor.

Kawa shook her head as she got to her feet, perking up to see Souji was faring decently against Amagiri, and for that she felt some measure of pride. The sound of a sword flying into the air jerked her attention away and to her 'brother', just as Kazama had punted his sword out of his grasp and forced him to fall back a few yards. "Toshi!" She barked, hurrying to defend him.

"**No**!" Chizuru's voice cut into the tension just as her kodachi's blade blocked Kazama's from striking, surprising both men plus her friends.

Souji perked up in surprise; "Chizuru?" Kawa gaped slightly, having come to a halt when seeing her roommate take action.

Punting his blade off hers sharply, Chizuru bared the shorter sword defensively, determination screaming in her eyes. "I won't let you hurt him!" She vowed.

Surprised and angered at the same time, Kazama glowered at the insolent woman's evident stance on the situation, and he demanded through clenched teeth, "Why do you defend these fools, the same fools who created those fake _oni?_ They'll only betray you in the end!"

Chizuru thought momentarily of how crazy her life had turned, that it was _because_ of the friends she'd made in Shinsengumi she was still _alive_! "Because I believe in them!" She answered proudly, further adding definition to the outrage in her fellow _oni_'s red glare.

Glare shifting to a sombered frown, Kazama lowered his sword and reluctantly returned it to the scabbard at his left hip with a scoff.

Shiranui snickered as he came to his comrade's side, "Ne, looks like you just got dumped, Kazama." He jibed.

"We're going." Kazama stated gruffly, turning about to lead his comrades out of the compound into the foggy air, Shiranui following with Amagiri bringing up the rear.

Toshi glared after their leave, scoffing and locating his katana, returning it to the scabbard. "Shinpachi, San'nan-san, check on the injured." He ordered, turning to retreat to his room.

Chizuru gave a steady exhale as she returned her sword to its scabbard with slightly shaky hands, blinking as her roommate came towards her. "Kawa-chan!" She said wearily.

"Who cares if you're an _oni?_ Keep fighting like a badass and I just might feel intimidated." Kawa replied calmly, seeing her brown eyes widen in surprise.

"R-really?" Looking at the wounded Rasetsu around them, she frowned and dropped her gaze. "But it's because of _me_ you all could've!" She began to say, perking up as the older girl pulled her into a hug.

"Family sticks together, Chizuru. When someone screws with one of us, they screw with ****all**** of us. That's all there is to it!" So don't try and drown in your own guilt." She pulled back to smile warmly at her friend, likewise determination in her gray stare.

"I think Kawa summed it up pretty well." Souji sighed as he came towards both girls, sparing a fond smirk at said girl, to which she winked.

"You two!" Sano rolled his eyes, plonking a hand on Chizuru's head and tousling her hair. "While Kawa-chan's got a point, I think it's easier to say that it's a man's job to protect a woman." He declared.

"I _don't_ need protection!" Kawa stuck her tongue out at him, arms folding at her chest.

Souji smiled knowingly and hooked his arm around her waist, making her '_eep_' as he pulled her close. "Yer not indestructible,

princess." He hummed, making her squirm as her cheeks became rosy pink.

Toshi smiled privately at the quartet, having been listening to Kawa's reassuring words; he resumed heading further into the compound.

* * *

><p>AN**: yo sorry for the wait! been frolicking on tumblr and dealing with life.. y'know how it goes. anyway~ not much else to put, but as i mentioned to **hineko** the other day, i'm going to go into Hekketsuroku as well, but i might put it on a different story file. still debating on that.

Souji: oi, Sarudoshi-chan wants ta thank everyone who's followed/faved this story lately. thanks a mil~ ;3

11. Hearts

**Hearts**

* * *

><p>"Saitou?" Sano looked at the third division captain in surprise and some measure of confusion.<p>

"Toshi, what's going on?" Kawa wondered, confused yet also glad her friend had returned to their ranks safely.

"Starting from today, Saitou is back with the Shinsengumi." Toshi informed; Kondou picked up when receiving the same confused expressions from the captains, relaying, "Acting under Toshi's orders, Saitou-kun was sent to spy on Itou-san's faction."

Souji pouted sorely, "Hajime-kun, yer not fair, havin' so much fun without me."

"Howcome you didn't _say_ anything, Toshi?" Kawa complained, scowling in the same manner at her old friend.

"Because _you_ can't keep _your_ mouth shut when it comes to Souji." Toshi huffed, catching the guilty light brighten her cheeks a shade of pink as said man coughed slightly.

Kondou smiled apologetically at the group, "Sorry for keeping everyone in the dark!"

When Chizuru left the room to go make some tea, the seriousness of what Saitou had to report seemed to clog the atmosphere around the occupants.

"Regarding Itou's faction and their deeds, there's no doubt whatsoever that they're dabbling in threatening actions aimed at the Shinsengumi." Saitou said with a grim edge to his voice.

"'Threatening actions'?" Inoue-san repeated.

Toshi elaborated, "In order to compromise the Shogunate's rule, Itou plans to squeal on us about the Rasetsu and the Ochimizu. The rumor that Harada was involved in the assassination of Sakamoto was also spread in vain attempt to drag the Shinsengumi into the case."

Shinpachi's blue eyes tightened, "seriously?"

Kawa sneered humorlessly, "that asswipe weasel." She growled.

"There's one more thing," Saitou's mouth formed into a thin line as he regained the attention of the room, his own gaze tight as he stated darkly, "they're planning to assassinate the Captain of the Shinsengumi."

"Kondou-san?" Souji perked up in revulsion and anger all at once; Kawa's lip curled as she shuddered.

Toshi spoke to distill the tense silence in the room, "It's pretty obvious our only choice is to kill Itou-san." He said just as Chizuru opened the door with a tray of tea on hand.

Sano asked, "and by doing that, we'll take out the mausoleum guard as well?"

"We have no choice." Kondou reminded.

Shinpachi perked up as he thought of something, "What about Heisuke?"

Toshi's own mouth formed into a thin line as he replied, "if he decides to stand against us, we'll have to kill him." He didn't see both women flinch slightly at his statement, straightening to exit the meeting and ignoring the younger woman's quieted call.

Kawa frowned at his departure, looking down as her hands were formed into fists in her lap; her eyes tightened.

"Are you serious about this; don't you care at all?" Chizuru surprised her by speaking out, looking at everyone gathered in disbelief.

"Chizuruâ€|" Kawa began.

"Of course we care; Toshi especiallyâ€| He honestly wants to keep him safe." Kondou said, straightening as well to leave and signify the meeting was over.

Sano followed shortly with Shinpachi and Inoue-san trailing in his wake, saying to the girl, "We also want Heisuke to be alright." He looked away from her sombered brown eyes as they left.

Souji and Kawa left after them, the former glancing at the latter as she had remained silent since hearing that Itou wanted Kondou assassinated; while it bothered him more than he let on, he knew she was just as bothered not only for Kondou's sake but for Heisuke as well.

Exhaling wearily, Kawa looked up at him as they were coming closer to

the room (they'd decided to share a room when moving out of Nishi Hongan-ji), pausing. "You okay?" She asked, her voice soft.

Blinking once at being momentarily caught off guard, Souji glanced out at the cold yard beyond the porch. "Are _you?_" If he was to be honest, he wanted to find that slippery bastard and gut him like a fish.

"No!" She scoffed quietly, gray eyes bitter. "I just! I'm worried and just pissed off!" She closed her eyes tight and smiled mirthlessly.

"The feeling's mutual," he huffed, green eyes slightly stoic, before he added, "I doubt Heisuke's stupid enough to stick with Itou-san that long, so don't go worryin' over him, okay?" He declared, perking her ears.

"Souji!" She quieted, slightly taken off guard by his words that were meant to be reassuring, before looking away from his green stare with a soft sigh. "Right." Some days he surprised her with words more than actions, and tonight was one of those moments.

He smiled slightly, blinking when she rested her forehead against his collarbone; sliding his eyes closed in resign, he folded his arms around her back and let her own hands dig into the back of his _haori_.

* * *

><p>Souji huffed as he assessed the amount of ronin that had come out of the shadows to play, smirking dangerously. "Just our luck."<p>

Kawa glared coldly at the swelled numbers, sighing. "Looks like Satsuma made new friends with the Choshu dogs! as if they could sink any _lower_." She glanced over at the two _oni_. "So, what do I win for guessing correctly?" She drawled.

"Ne, Harada, I'm surprised your bitch is so clever." Shiranui scoffed, violet eyes on said captain's gold.

"I must apologize for the sneak-attack, but we're simply following our clan's orders." Amagiri said, looking at the clustered Shinsengumi coats.

Souji sneered, "Fancy that; we've got similar orders to cut _you_ _lot_ down." He remarked.

"Oi, Shiranui, I forgot to ask last we met, but I was under the impression ya were from Choshu." Sano wondered sardonically.

"Y'know as much as I hate to break it to ya, Satsuma and Choshu couldn't be better friends." Shiranui said just as another pack of ronin that had come to their aid dispersed a few ronin from the pack to come circle the Shinsengumi members.

Kawa smiled coldly, moonlight glinting off the sharp side of her katana. "This's gonna be a long night!" She mused quietly, perking up slightly as one of the ronin shielding the two _oni_ lunged at them only to be intercepted by Shinpachi.

Four more ronin flew at the couple as the rest of the ronin converged on the pack.

Blood flew as her blade ripped the throat open of one ronin, left foot extending sharply to hit the second ronin in the gut and send him back only to be skewered on her lover's katana; she dodged a particular swipe from another ronin that was meant for her neck, grunting as her own blade ripped viciously and cleanly across the man's chest, her right foot kicking him away. Wiping blood from her left cheek, she watched another three hesitate to attack her, and she bared her teeth slightly. "***Bring** **it**", bitches!" She challenged brazenly, feeling as giddy as Souji probably felt when the trio converged on her.

Souji kicked aside the ronin whose throat he'd just punctured, panting slightly and glancing over at his lover as she had taken on three more ronin, blood flying from one of the trio that she'd ripped the throat out of, her left foot kicking the second ronin's chest sharply and away as she rammed her blade into the third ronin's chest, yanking it out swiftly as he also fell at her feet. He grinned proudly, perking up as another two rushed him from the side and he dodged the left one, impaling the second one on his katana by his heart; his green eyes glittered dangerously as he used the dying ronin's short sword to stab into the throat of the second ronin who'd attempted to attack from behind, yanking his blade free as both men fell. "How're ya doin' over there, babe?" He wondered jovially of the She-Wolf, using the borrowed short sword to throw it at the back of a ronin that attempted to attack her from behind, slashing through the throat of another ronin on his left side.

"Just lovely, actually!" Kawa hummed contently, teeth gritted as she held her own against a ronin's blade, shoving him off only to stab into his chest using his short sword she'd nicked, yanking the blade free as its owner dropped. She was slightly winded, and her body was only standing because of the adrenaline in her veins, but otherwise she was fine.

It was moments like this where she almost forgot she was human.

Souji chuckled at her jovial tone, looking in Sano and Shinpachi's direction and the smile briefly fell from his lips as he recognized their foe had regained their numbers. He grumbled a curse, "Kawa!" He began, perking her ears.

"What is it?" Kawa followed his line of sight and her own eyes widened; "_shit_." As much fun as it was cutting down the traitorous dogs they'd been dealt tonight, she didn't think she could handle killing _more_ of them!

A few ronin in the front of the pack moved aside as Amagiri and Shiranui stepped forward, the latter speaking, "I have a proposition for you Shinsengumi: if you'll be so kind as to hand over Yukimura Chizuru to us, we'll let you live." Amagiri smirked slightly. "Personally, I don't think it's such a bad trade. Given your numbers are small compared to ours, it's only wise to not prolong the fighting."

All four Shinsengumi members — plus Heisuke, who'd been standing in

the back the whole time" looked to see Chizuru was present as well, also having witnessed the slaughter.

Gray eyes narrowing in revulsion, Kawa stepped forward to spit at Amagiri's feet. "I'll be damned if I let you cowardly monsters take my friend!" She said brazenly, a glare matching that of her 'brother's crossing her pretty face. "Tell Kazama to go rot in hell where he belongs."

"Your bitch's bark is as weak as her bite!" Shiranui jeered with a snide smirk at said woman and then at the other captains.

Kawa raised her katana a smidge just as Sano extended his arm to stop her, earning a brief look from the woman.

"Yukimura Chizuru, will you join us?" Amagiri asked the girl again, making the older girl look at her alertly.

Chizuru faltered, glancing at her friends and pretending her fellow female's disbelieving stare didn't hurt, before looking at the two oni. "If I go with you, you promise you won't hurt them, right?" She wondered; her feet moved forward, and before she knew it, she was walking towards the pack of their foes.

"Chizuru!" Kawa protested, perking up in surprise as Sano, Shinpachi and Souji moved to stop the younger girl from moving further away.

"Ya acted really cool for a second there, Chizuru." Sano mused.

"We'll handle the rest." Shinpachi chimed.

Souji glanced at the younger girl with his trademark smirk, "Ya didn't think we'd let you leave with those freaks, didja, Chizuru-chan?" He jibed.

Kawa patted her shoulder gently, gray eyes bright with determination when they met her surprised brown. "They screw with you, then they're screwing with ****us****, as well." She stated.

"All of you" Chizuru began quietly in surprise and some measure of guilt, quieting as she deemed that if they were willing to fight, then so was she. She drew her kodachi, holding it in both hands' grip, missing the proud smirk from her fellow female.

"Oi, Heisuke, what're ya standing around for? Get yer ass over here! Ya don't want Sano to take all the glory, do ya?" Shinpachi beckoned the younger captain, slightly surprising him.

Smirking wryly despite feeling guilty for having left their ranks, Heisuke's shoulders slumped and he came forward to join their pack. "Typical Shinpatsu and Sano-san" you always drag me into stuff like this, acting cool and crap; never lettin' me choose."

Sano huffed, "Like you don't pull the same crap with us!" He jibed.

Souji chuckled, "Y'know, this's almost reminiscent of Ikedaya." He commented lightly.

"My thoughts exactly." Kawa agreed with a smirk.

* * *

><p>AN**: sorry for the short chapter, folks, but i'm going to mesh both eps 11/12 into one chapter for the last chap (yes the continuation is going to be on a separate story file, sorry.) of Shinsengumi Kitan.

also, whew Chizuru acting like a badass! ahah i accept all responsibilities on that part~ d:

12. Flames

Flames

* * *

><p>Teeth clenching, she forced herself to look away as Yamazaki removed the bullet from his shoulder, some small part of her â€"what remained of her childhood, if she were to guess correctly- wanting to cover her ears when Kondou stifled a pained cry.<p>

"I must apologize, Vice-Commander. He got shot on the return trip from Nijou Castle." Shimada-san said near her.

Toshi asked, "he rode back here in that condition?" He didn't miss the brunette near his 'sister' that had been looking away from the scene ever since they'd begun treating him.

"Yes, only because he would've been killed by the assailants if he'd fallen off his horse. I'm sorry that I couldn't protect him." Shimada-san dipped his head in shame.

"The fault is mine for not changing his mind when he declined extra guards simply because the headquarters' defenses would be shortened." Toshi shook his head, looking past him at the second woman present. "Yasakawa, you should get some rest; it's been a long day." He advised quietly, nodding slightly when meeting her surprised gray eyes.

Since she was ten years old, he knew she held admiration for Kondou-san, even considered him as a father in the absence of her own; he imagined seeing him like this hurt her more than she wished to admit.

Nodding slightly, Kawa offered a weak smile before she left the room with a silent Souji at her heels.

Souji's pace quickened slightly once they were away from the room, slightly taking her off guard, before she quickly followed him.

"Souji, slow downâ€| **Souji**!" Kawa grabbed his right arm, bringing him to a halt as they were near their room, looking at him worriedly. "Calm down, okay?" She requested, knowing her words were vain, even to her own ears; she felt his sentiment, and wanted nothing more than to kill the cowards who'd tried to assassinate Kondou, but now wasn't

the time to act irrationally.

Not with war in the air.

"How the hell can I be ****calm****, Yasakawa?" Souji demanded tersely as he glared at her, seeing her wince when he spoke her full name, and he curbed his tone slightly before looking away at the foggy courtyard. "You heard what they did to him, you saw! I can'tâ€¦ I won't forgive anyone who hurts Kondou-san!" He snapped, closing his eyes tightly as she felt his hand shake slightly in anger.

"Now isn't the time to act stupid, Souji! I know you feel hurt and pissed beyond belief for what happened to Kondou-san, but stillâ€¦ that doesn't give either of us the right to be reckless." She reasoned evenly, keeping her grip on his arm.

He inhaled sharply through his nostrils, perking up as she did when hearing gunshots in the distance, sounding like they were coming from town; his green eyes tightened in disgust, and his legs began moving away to go kill those cowards taunting them but was halted when her grip on his arm remained.

Looking back at her, he saw her face was contorted into a deep frown. "Let go, Kawa." He ordered.

"You know I won'tâ€¦ If you think I'm gonna let you get killed because of this, you're out of your mind!" She declared sharply, gray eyes pained and frustrated at the same time.

"I know you want to kill them as much as I do!" Souji exclaimed angrily, something inside him cringing when tears began congregating at the bottoms of her beautiful gray eyes, that same something hating that he was the cause of her tears.

He hated seeing her cry.

"I'm not gonna let you die on me, Okita Souji!" Kawa shouted, tears streaking down her cheeks slowly, and she instinctively pulled him into a tight embrace, burying her face into his shoulder. "I promised you that, five years agoâ€¦ I won't go back on it, no matter what." She croaked.

Souji flinched when she embraced him, the same something mentally kicking him when her hot tears burned into his haori, and his own arms reflexively hugged her waist, nearly crushing her in his arms. "Stubborn princess." He grumbled, resting his cheek on the top of her head, his left hand's fingers curling in her black hair she'd let down.

* * *

><p>"Yamazaki, tend to him." Toshi shrugged off the injured soldier to him, perking up to see Kawa skidding to a halt short of seeing him present from inside the compound with Chizuru closely following and Inoue-san trailing behind them; he smiled slightly at the swordswoman-turned-nurse.<p>

"Toshi, I'm glad you're alrightâ€¦" Blinking when catching crimson on his right hand, Kawa frowned and exhaled, pulling her handkerchief out of her uniform coat sleeve, stepping closer to him. "Lunkheaded

oni." She scolded, taking his hand as she pulled a strip of cloth from the handkerchief.

He made a sideways expression at her scolding, huffing. "It's just a scratch! Ow." He grumbled when she tightened the makeshift bandage, scowling patiently at her.

"Regardless, it's best to not die because of your pride." She reasoned, distinctly feeling as if she'd told him the same thing before.

Perking up at having the distinct feeling of déjà vu, his violet eyes softened slightly and he lowered his hand when she finished dressing the menial wound. "It's almost creepy that you're still the forceful nurse you were, in a different time." He mused quietly.

Kawa blushed slightly before huffing and looking past him at the gates, wincing when another cannon went off somewhere near the Fushimi compound. "Are the boys doing well?" She asked, thinking of the captains but one in particular.

"Last I looked, yeah; and your cat still has his nine lives." Toshi exhaled, seeing her perk up slightly at the mention of said brunette.

A sneeze came from the threshold of the gate. "Ne, already yer talkin' about me, Hijikata-san!"

"Okita-san, Saitou-san, Harada-san!" Chizuru declared in relief at seeing all three captains present with the lattermost shouldering a wounded soldier.

Yamazaki approached him to take care of the man as Souji accepted the tight hug from the swordswoman, holding her with some measure of protectiveness.

"I must apologize, _Fukuchou_; the firepower overwhelmed us to the point where we couldn't break through to Ryuu'un-ji." Saitou declared, speaking for both third and first division's failure in the mission.

Souji huffed blandly, "My whole damn squad got shot in the street like dogs; Hajime-kun and I were lucky to regroup with Sano-san and return in one piece." He added, releasing his lover save his right arm that was hooked around her waist.

"Shinpachi, has he come back yet?" Sano asked then, looking from Kawa to Toshi, Chizuru and Inoue-san.

Inoue-san shook his head. "No, not yet." He replied, watching the taller captain's frown deepen.

Once the group of seven managed to return to the smaller meeting room of the compound, Sano and Saitou began relaying more information on the enemy.

"The Satcho's guns have an impressively long range. Two-thirds of their bullets hit the targets accurately, even from a ways off." Saitou informed.

Sano agreed, "Even if a volley of their gunfire came on us simultaneouslyâ€¦" He trailed off with a grim note in his voice.

Chizuru winced slightly, "That's horrible; doesn't that mean that Nagakura-san and Shimada-san areâ€¦?" She dared wonder.

The rest of the group quieted at the grim notion.

"Oi, we're back!" All seven heads shot up alertly to see both men returned in one piece, surprising the group.

"Shinpatsu, Shimada-san!" Kawa laughed slightly in relief.

"Shinpachi!" Sano declared, smiling in likewise relief.

Huffing lightly, Shinpachi smirked at his friends, "What're you lot lookin' so ghastly for? I'm not a ghost, I've got legs!" He joked as both he and Shimada-san sat down, lamenting. "That was some nightmare; the enemy seriously rained iron bullets on us! We couldn't even break past their forces. And the bitch of it isâ€¦" His hands formed into fists on reflex, "I nearly lost all my men in that hellfire." He said grimly.

Another cannon went off, sounding closer to the compound as it sent a tremor through the room.

"They're gettin' closer," Souji grouched.

"Toshi-san," Inoue-san looked at their temporary commander, earning the room's attention to said man.

Lifting up his katana, Toshi spoke more to himself, "Has the age of swords and spears really come to an end?" He didn't miss the simultaneous wince earned from Souji and Saitou at his question, stubbing the bottom of the scabbard into the floor with a tightened fist, making the healing injury on his hand reopen to let crimson stain the cloth; he looked at the group with hardened violet eyes. "We're retreating todayâ€¦ But we haven't been defeated. This debt ****will**** be repaid." At receiving a round of sharp nods from the captains plus his 'sister', he added, "Send out the Rasetsu Unit when the fire's gone out to pave a way for the soldiers. And someone will need to head to Yodo Castle to request reinforcements."

"I'll go." Chizuru offered, slightly surprising those gathered.

Toshi raised a brow at her, "You will?"

"_Hai_." Everyone's tired and needs to rest up for later, so it's only fair that I go. Please let me help." Chizuru nodded.

Kawa looked at her 'brother' first, "I'll go with her; it'd be easier if the message was delivered with two messengersâ€¦"

"_You're_ staying on standby to treat the wounded." Toshi interjected pointedly.

"Toshi-san has a point, it's best I go instead." Inoue-san agreed, surprising both girls.

"Inoue-sanâ€|" Chizuru quieted when he smiled lightly at her.

Kawa exhaled and nodded her consent, "Be careful then, both of you."

Toshi nodded slightly, "I'm counting on you two."

Once they left, his 'sister' set to work on his reopened cut. "You both worry too much, y'know that?" Kawa reproached patiently as she dabbed antiseptic on his injury, handing the cleaning liquid back to Souji as he had lingered by her side.

Toshi briefly winced at the sting the cleaning fluid brought, exhaling and scowling patiently at her. "I told you before, that I'd be damned before I let anything happen to my kid sister." He stated, watching her bandage his hand with a clean strip of cloth.

Souji sighed, "The oni's got a point; 'sides, sending the both of ya out there would've been suicidal." It still didn't sit well in his stomach when the idea of her being killed came to mind.

Blushing slightly, Kawa finished tying the cloth, a smile creeping onto her features. "Lunkheads." She muttered, looking away.

:::::lDl:::::

Looking at the carnage around them, she caught sight of the felled Inoue-san and her hands formed into fists on reflex. "Inoue-sanâ€|" She looked at her 'brother' as Souji and Shinpachi moved to lift the injured Yamazaki from the ground; she closed her eyes tightly for a second and exhaled.

"You idiot!"

Toshi looked up at her insult, half-expecting her to clock him for his recklessness he'd shown, but he was caught off guard when she hugged him tightly; violet eyes sombering slightly, he looked at his 'sister'. "Yasakawaâ€|" He felt her fingers cling to his haori as she had buried her face in his shoulder, muffled words being uttered into the fabric.

:::::lDl:::::

"So you're a Rasetsu now."

He glanced back to see she was approaching his side as he stood at the rail of the deck, closing his eyes momentarily when she came to his left. "You just missed Chizuru; I thought you two were sharing a cabin." He mused quietly.

"I'm bunking with Souji, actuallyâ€| Poor kid, been through hell since Toba-Fushimi. Suppose we all have." She replied, arms folded at her chest as she stared at the blue waters beyond their ship.

"You hate that I took the Ochimizu." He didn't ask.

Stiffening slightly, she gave a soft sigh and closed her eyes as a breeze pulled at the black locks of her bangs framing her face. "I'm not happy about it, but at the same time, I can't dictate what you do with your lifeâ€¦ I just feel I need to be there for you, given you act like a dumbass big brother nearly half the time." She explained.

Blinking at hearing she called him her big brother, his violet eyes softened, and he scoffed under his breath. "I'm sorry I put you through hell, that week of Toba-Fushimi, and then what happened with Kondou-sanâ€¦ We've had a run of bad luck for the last few years, haven't we?" He joked with a bitter edge to his voice.

"Striving to make a name for ourselves isn't without blood, sweat and tearsâ€¦ But yeah, we have." Kawa chuckled, glancing at him and adding, "Since you're technically a true _oni_ nowâ€¦" She slugged his shoulder hard, retracting her arm as he grumbled an '_ow_' and rubbed his now-bruised shoulder. "_That_ shouldn't even have made you break a sweat."

"Yet _you_ remain the forceful iron-fisted She-Wolf. Cripes, that hurt!" Toshi barked, scowling sorely at his adoptive sister.

"Don't be such a wuss, you overgrown _oni_." Kawa sighed nonchalantly, not minding his brow-twitching glare.

"You're so annoying."

"Love you too, _onii-chan_~."

"Don't call me that!"

* * *

><p>AN**: alrighy, well hope you guys enjoyed this. i intend to start up Hekketsuroku in a bit, so just a head's up. reviews are welcome, i don't bite.. much~. :3

End
file.